

Volume One

# MURDEROUS PASSIONS

THE DELIRIOUS CINEMA OF **JESÚS FRANCO**

Stephen Thrower  
with Julian Grainger

# MURDEROUS PASSIONS

THE DELIRIOUS CINEMA OF JESÚS FRANCO

VOLUME 1: 1959-1974

by Stephen Thrower  
with Julian Grainger



Murderous Passions  
The Delirious Cinema of Jesús Franco

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The author dedicates this book with love, gratitude, and the distant sound of screams, to Ossian Brown.

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*Flyleaf: Janine Reynaud as the mysterious Lorna Green, in Succubus (1967).*

*Facing page: Maria Röhm as a rape victim incarcerated for murdering her attacker in 99 Women (1968).*

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## DATES AND TITLES

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*Stephen Thrower*





# Author's Foreword

*"The storyline's not so hot but all of the details are absolutely authentic and some of them are quite extraordinary."*

Paul Vogel (Jess Franco), in *Exorcism*

How on Earth do you begin to write a book about Jess Franco, the world's most prolific filmmaker? The answer, in my case at least, is to lie to yourself until it's too late to turn back!

It all began so innocently. In 2008 I posted a few reviews to an online chat group, in which I explored my feelings about a handful of recently viewed Franco titles. The informal setting and the swiftness with which I wrote the pieces suggested to me that doing the same for all of Franco's films might not be such a daunting task. No need for too much detail; the project would simply be a collection of (hopefully insightful and amusing) reviews, delivered with style but without the heavy lifting of critical biography or in-depth historical study. If I wrote three reviews per week – keeping it light, and skirting the can of worms labelled 'research' – such a book could be finished in eighteen months. A quickie, something I could slot in between the two volumes of my ongoing major work, *Nightmare USA*. Yes, you read that right. I actually convinced myself I could write a 'quickie' book about Jess Franco. Which just goes to show that you should never underestimate the capacity of the human mind to delude itself...

The trouble with writing about Franco is that the more you say, the more you want to say. The more you know, the more you want to know. And so one is sucked into the swamps and whirlpools of Francoland, coaxed into the labyrinth of multiple versions, the background miasma of anecdote and myth. I soon began to lose sight of that 'quickie' project and the whole thing started mutating. Before long I was chewing over a frustrating amount of conflicting information, and what began as basic fact-checking morphed into the quixotic desire to collate a precise filmography. A seemingly straightforward ambition, you might think, but in the case of Jess Franco one that quickly steers you onto the rocks of uncertainty. Just to ascertain the exact order in which the films were made proved a major challenge – here is a man who shot as many as ten or in one instance *fourteen* feature films in a single year! This simple fact has serious repercussions: you can hardly call one film a progression or improvement on another, or the first example of this or that, if you've got the sequence wrong. And this is just the start of your troubles: the closer you get to completing the task the more insistent are the siren calls of other factual lacunae. What about cast lists? Surely one ought to credit at least every speaking performer?

In 2010, with the potential workload doubling, I asked my friend Julian Grainger, an adept and indefatigable film researcher, to come onboard. To begin with he was not a Franco aficionado, although it pleases the Sadean in me to report that he soon fell under the man's hypnotic spell. Let me tell you, it's good to have company in a labyrinth! Surely between us we could fill in the gaps, and fix the information into some kind of reliable order?

Well, we have tried very hard, and I think we've worked wonders, although such aims are still partially out of reach six years later. We send this book to the printers with gaps and questions still nagging at our nerves; who is the man outside the chapel of Saint Cecilia in *A Virgin among the Living Dead*? Why, when he turns up in virtually every Portuguese shoot between 1971 and 1974, does he never receive a screen credit? Who the hell plays 'The Monster of Duranstein' in *Les Grandes Emmerdeuses*? Or Donen's murdered wife in *She Killed in Ecstasy*? And will we ever see *Sex Charade*, that most frustratingly inaccessible Jess Franco film, made in 1969 with the mesmerising Soledad Miranda and still missing from the archives of the world? How can we bear to publish this book when such questions remain? The answer, although it tugs at my vitals to say it, is that there will *always* be loose ends. Waiting until one's every question is answered would result in a 4000 page monstrosity, probably published in 2030, and I'm not sure I'll live that long. Even now, *Murderous Passions* demands a two-volume structure: the total page count for both is around 850, which is commercially impractical for a single book. Consequently, Volume 2, covering 1975 to 2013, will come a year after Volume 1, incorporating cast interviews plus analysis of themes emerging from the second half of Franco's career.

Whilst Jess was alive one could check certain things with the man himself. However, nitpicking the minutiae was not an option, and communicating by email was a non-starter too; he really didn't like it. Lina took care of correspondence as best she could and I was able to verify a few details, as long as they didn't turn into a torrent. Now, both Jess and Lina are gone, and certain stories are lost forever.

In writing this book I have drawn upon the support of so many people. Firstly I'd like to say a major thank-you to my partner Ossian Brown, for keeping the wheels turning in the real world while I disappeared into Francoland, and for assisting me with design and picture restoration. A thousand thank-yous to Marc Morris for his constant help, and his generosity in allowing me access to his phenomenal collection of videos, posters, pressbooks and stills. The same goes for Lucas Balbo, whose collection of memorabilia is as labyrinthine as the Franco catalogue, and whose work in that essential book *Obsession* provided me with one of the sturdiest marker-buoys in the choppy waters of Franco scholarship. I also owe a huge debt of gratitude to Alain Petit, who sent me his utterly invaluable out-of-print publication *The Manacoa Files*, along with advice, support and goodwill during the long haul to publication. My sincere thanks to Christophe Bier and Jean-Pierre Bouyxou, both of whom provided me with essential images and information. Guiskard Oberparleiter and Uwe Huber threw significant new light on Franco's German productions, and (along with Thomas Bleich and Gerd Naumann) provided me with a truly eye-popping array of



visual material, including many fascinating and evocative behind-the-scenes shots, for which I'm immensely grateful. The intensity of the Franco flame that burned through my viewing habits in the first two years of writing this book was fanned by a constant stream of discs and encouraging emails from Frank Henenlotter, whose passionate appreciation of Jess Franco was inspirational. I'm greatly indebted to Thomas Eikrem, publisher of the extraordinary *Filmrage* books, for scans of his lobby cards and stills, plus Bruce Holecheck and Armin Junge, for permission to reproduce some gorgeous items from their collections. Gavin Mitchell came with me to Málaga to assist with Spanish translation during my meeting with Jess and Lina; his input, and his dirty laugh, helped the interview to become a pleasurable social occasion for all of us. Sourcing rare alternative versions of Franco films would have been a lot less fun without the kind and supportive contributions of Brandon Merkely, Frédérick Durand, Magnus Jansson, Patrick Lambert, Brian Horrorwitz, Guy L Murray and Jonathan Cox. For help with synopses, merci beaucoup and grazie mille to Éric Peretti, Roberto Curti and Pete Tombs, the latter of whom also helped me with obscure French interview material and stills. Alyssa Joye made the inclusion of Spanish press notices much easier through her sterling assistance with translation. Jean-Paul Dorchain was very kind and helpful during my fact-gathering trip to the Brussels Cinematek Library, for which opportunity I would like

to thank Wim Castermans and the Offscreen Film Festival. Nigel Wingrove of Redemption kept me supplied with his marvellous slate of Franco releases, while David Gregory lifted my spirits (and added to my knowledge base) by putting out a sensational Blu-ray of *The Hot Nights of Linda*. Thank-you to Daniel Lesoeur for kindly answering some of my questions regarding the films Jess made with Eurociné, and my grateful appreciation to Carlos Aguilar, author of *Jess Franco, el sexo del horror*, who put me in touch with Jess and Lina, and whose book provided me with page after page of valuable insight and information. Simon Birrell, Gaëlle Soka and Sylvain Perret also helped me to reach certain individuals. Julian Grainger would like to thank Francesco Cesari (for transcribing credits from rare prints), Ferran Herranz (for rare Spanish film prints), Álex Mendibil (for advice), Ismael Fernández (for advice and some golden nuggets of actor identification), Dan Robinson (for rare press materials), and Alison Frost (for translation from Spanish to English). Finally, Julian and I would both like to extend our deepest thanks to Antonio Mayans, for sharing with us his memories of Jess, helping us to identify cast and crew members, and – to our great delight – generously giving his time and assistance when we visited the Filmoteca Española in Madrid to see *Labios rojos*.

Stephen Thrower, September 2014



# Magic Jess and His Happy Motor

## Foreword by Monica Swinn

"I don't remember if it was last week, or last month, or last year" - *Venus in Furs*

These Murderous Passions are killing me! I doubt if you can imagine how much this book makes me happy. But the whirlwind of emotions, reflections and souvenirs of all kinds that I've been through since it landed in my life makes me feel a little bit dizzy. Happy, deeply honoured to have been invited, but somewhat confused. So, excuse me if my words sometimes struggle to find their way...

Do you remember those luminous spheres that were so much in fashion in the early seventies? Perhaps you are too young for that. You mostly found them in discos. Made from a myriad of tiny mirrors, they were always turning, turning around, and their shimmering glow drew you into a strange halfway state between dream and reality... That is the image that comes to my mind when thinking about Jess, his films and his world. It is my Francosphere.

Inside, people have a great time together, making films without knowing if they will ever see the result on a screen. Who cares? What happens here is more pleasure than work. At the very centre of the sphere you have Magic Jess... Jesús Franco Manera, friendly puckish devil, the almighty deus in machina. No evil in that devil: just a little round man with a camera.

He entered my life at the end of 1973. By chance. He was in Brussels making a new film and was searching for an actress. I received a phone call from a local producer, and suddenly I was there, in the dimly lit office of a man I barely knew, in front of Jess Franco. By his side, a very pretty young woman whose name I had never heard before: "Mademoiselle Lina Romay". She seemed, then, a little bit shy...

Back home, when I announced to my companion Jean-Pierre Bouyxou that I was going to work with Jess Franco, he couldn't believe his ears. A fan of fantasy films, erotica, horror movies, he was in that far-off time one of the rare journalists to care about

Jesús Franco. He was crazy about Jess's films and dying to meet him, and when I entered the Francosphere, so did he. Stepping into his own dream, he joined the famous Orloff family, playing a doctor in *Female Vampire (La comtesse noire)* – descendant of that 'awful' Doctor Orloff, unforgettably played in a previous film by the wonderful Howard Vernon (whom Jean-Pierre would soon meet for real on another film).

With Franco, you would keep on meeting the same people from one film to another, and you enjoyed it because most of these people were actually likeable. It was a not insignificant part of the pleasure I got from working with him (yes, dear Pamela). But forty years later, when you try to recall what you did, and for what film... Jesus! Mission impossible. Not to mention the tortures most of Jess's films have suffered, often while his back was turned! Dismembered, mutilated, mixed with squalid stuff, scattered all over the world, their magic blown away, reduced to pieces of confetti, under the ugliest, the most vulgar and most unfortunate titles. Poor Black Countess, assassinated by The Swallowers! You don't quite follow me? Don't worry... Whatever seems misty to you here, you'll find bright when you discover the resources of this present work.

After *La comtesse noire*, I worked, more or less, for four years with Jess. A time of

intense activity during which he had total freedom to quench on me the darkest of his murderous passions. And so he did. Not himself in person – the only time Jess killed me with his own hands was in *Exorcism*. During that scene he had difficulty keeping a straight face, so much that he was laughing behind his beard! Old son of a gun! But decidedly not a killer. Just a serial film-maker and a most seriously talented one. My thanks to Jesús Franco for having been so alive, with the guts to go happily against the rules, always living his own life in his own way. And thank you Jess, for having





exorcised from me a lot of my fears. To have killed me sometimes, then to have rather often resuscitated me, so that I am here today with you in this book.

You, who are entering Franco's world by the doors of his films, had better forget everything you know about what cinema should be, and always remember: "*We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded with a sleep.*" (The Tempest, Act 4, scene 1). Jess would never have quoted Old Great Will. His modesty would have forbidden him to show off his own culture, which was wide-ranging, and which appeared outstanding when he began to speak about jazz or cinema. In fact, he knew perfectly well the classical rules of film-making. He had simply decided to free his creativity from any bounds. Do you remember that incredible rape scene between Jess and Lina in *Barbed Wired Dolls*? It was filmed in 'natural slow motion', a brainwave Jess had on the set that morning. He was happy like a child. He could barely hide his joy and Lina was in the same mood. Of course, he knew perfectly well what he was doing with that true/false 'natural slow motion': not lousy faking, just a good joke. And yet a lot of people, who for the most part only knew his work by hearsay, continued for years to spread enormous barrels of bullshit about him, without even trying to verify the facts for themselves...

Flashback. A projection in a theatre. The film suddenly breaks. The lights come back on. Hubbub and fuss, the public demand an explanation. Smirking, the man in charge of the place says: "You really don't know? Everybody knows that Jesús Franco never ends his movies!" True story. In the seventies, between two films I was shooting with Jess, I attempted to see *The Awful Dr. Orlof* which was showing – an exceptional event at that time for a Franco movie – at the Paris Cinémathèque. The last reel was missing. I'm not kidding. At the Cinémathèque! Many years later, Jess would earn the right to have several retrospectives in this temple of culture, organised by passionate, loyal supporters. Let's give them thanks! If Jess became, in his final years, a 'cult film maker', it was not due to the official cultural bodies of France or Spain, but to enthusiasts, lovers of his work, who first detected the very special magic that emanates from his films. I call it the Franco touch.

Yes... there is a Franco touch, as there is a Lubitsch touch. Don't ask me what it is, but people who can see will confirm that it is no illusion, no myth. Franco was not a lousy little director, 'un tâcheron' (hack) as they say in France. He was a great filmmaker. Yet he was wary of intellectual conceit, of ready-made ideas, theories on art and all sorts of dogma. For him the set was a playground, where he could transform his dreams into realities. So those 'realities' could become the dreams of others through the magic of cinema. A happy motor.

Since I first met him, many books have been published about Uncle Jess. This one will be difficult to beat! *Murderous Passions* is the most incredible, monstrous (by size) and wonderful (by content) amount of information ever hunted and collected and put together about Jesús Franco. Ali-Baba's cave for those who already know and love Franco's films, this colossal work, which is the perfect mirror of his universe, could be the best door through which to explore it. Don't worry if you can't find your way back: these passions will not kill you. On the contrary. Without passions, no life...

He was a great illusionist and a dear f(r)iend. It is a joy and a huge honour to have been invited to write the foreword for such an amazing tribute to a man who could say about himself, after a half-century career and about two hundred films, "*I have never believed myself worthy of anything*". I think that the homage in these pages would have pleased him more than any Oscar, César or Goya. This book is a gift for all those who, over the years, have truly come to love his films. He would have been delighted. He wouldn't have shown it, of course, but he would have smiled. For Steve, principal author of this outstanding work, I have no words to express correctly my gratitude for everything he did to make this book what it is.

Monica Swinn  
Nowhere but here now  
Normandy, France  
12th of February 2015





*Jess Franco with Janine Reynaud during the shooting of Succubus in 1967.*



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*Stephen Thrower*







*The Flamingo Club proudly presents...*

## The Jess Franco Experience!

*Wild music, stimulating spectacle, beautiful women...  
Exotic delights for your viewing pleasure - live and unleashed!*

WARNING - SHOW CONTAINS NUDITY, BLOOD, SADISTIC SITUATIONS



On February 1st 2009, Spain's prestigious Goya Film Awards – organised by the Spanish Academy of Cinematic Art and Science – took place at the Palacio Municipal de Congresos in Madrid. The grand dames and tuxedoed gentlemen of Spain's film elite sat expectantly, sipping champagne at their tables and looking forward to a galaxy of stars, including Benicio del Toro, hot favourite for best actor after his dynamic performance as Che Guevara in Steven Soderbergh's biopic *Che (Part I): The Argentine*, and Penélope Cruz, reaping plaudits for her Woody Allen film *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*. The night would be especially gratifying for director Javier Fesser, whose *Camino*, the story of the Opus Dei's manipulative 'canonisation' of a dying cancer victim, netted six awards, including best film, best director and best actress for Carme Elías.

The climax of the evening, however, came hurtling out of left field. Few of the assembled glitterati can have expected to see, before the night was through, a naked man and woman tied up and whipped in a circle of knives, two scimitar-wielding lesbians duking it out on a hilltop, a sadomasochistic orgy in a brothel, a nude muscleman sexually tormented by a gas-masked vixen, or a coven of elderly witches massaging their nipples with a crucifix. Such, though, was the explosion of licentiousness unleashed in a montage of images from the career of Spanish filmmaker Jesús Franco Manera, aka Jess Franco, who received a Lifetime Achievement Award that evening, presented to him by his friend, and star of his 1996 film *Killer Barbys*, Santiago Segura. Clips from Franco movies like *The Awful Dr. Orlof*, *Sadomania*, *Justine*, *Exorcism*, *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein*, *Blue Rita*, *The Story of Linda*, *A Virgin among the Living Dead*, and many more (including one mistakenly culled from Erwin Dietrich's *Caged Women*) were interspersed with interview snippets from leading lights of the Franco repertory company: actors Jack Taylor, Antonio Mayans and Ricardo Palacios, and *Vampyros Lesbos* screenwriter Jaime Chávarri. A few days earlier Franco had responded to the news of his forthcoming canonisation by saying, *"It is a joy and a huge honour. I never expected any recognition of my career. Nobody ever gave me anything, just for my first short film about Pío Baroja, for which they gave me many awards here and outside Spain ... I am delighted*

*as I have never believed myself worthy of anything. I think it's a lovely gift."*<sup>1</sup> In his acceptance speech on the big night he declared, *"I'm a man in love with cinema, I make films because films fulfil my life, I never wanted to get awards. I want to offer this to Juan Antonio Bardem, who first took me in to filmmaking, to my partner, Lina, who's put up with me for thirty years, and to the Paris Cinémathèque."* Ever a champion of the underappreciated, he went on to dedicate the award to *"all the young short filmmakers who keep looking for someone to help them to make their first feature film."*

It was a touching occasion, but an odd one too, which the physically frail but mentally alert Franco later regarded with wry amusement. After all, his homeland had all but blacklisted him in the late 1960s, and by the time he returned in 1979, after years living in France and Switzerland, his standing in the Spanish industry was negligible. In the years leading up to his Goya Award in 2009 there had never been the slightest suggestion of financial support from the Spanish film authorities (nor would there be afterwards). He was free to make whatever kind of films he wanted, but without a shred of assistance from film councils or funding bodies. Truth be told, Franco was temperamentally unsuited to obtaining finance through such channels anyway; it is impossible to picture him with a begging letter in one hand, a detailed script breakdown in the other, hopping, skipping and jumping through an obstacle course of meetings, deliberations and delays. Official funding can take years to secure, and if there's one thing Jess Franco hated it was wasting time.

In the early 1960s Franco had been hailed in the Spanish press as a stylish, talented, sometimes provocative new talent; as the decade progressed, however, that taste for provocation would drive a wedge between him and his homeland. Spain was under the iron rule of General Francisco Franco, and as Jess's films got bolder and sexier, the authorities took against him; furious rows with the Spanish censor board, and run-ins with the courts regarding licentious productions shot in landmark Spanish locations, led to his unofficial 'excommunication' in 1969. Returning to live in Spain in 1979, four years after the death of the General, he found the new situation bitter-sweet. Bitter, because he could no longer attract even medium-sized budgets; sweet, because relaxation of

◀ Dany (María Silva) accepts a party invitation from a maniac, in *The Awful Dr. Orlof* (1961).

censorship meant that as long as he worked within the extremely low budgets available there were no limits to what he could show. For Franco, freedom mattered far more than money, and so he embarked on a feverish deluge of ultra low-budget productions, with output between 1980 and 1985 numbering some fifty films. In 1983 he reached the pinnacle of his productivity, directing thirteen films in a twelve month period, an output unrivalled by any but the one-reeler specialists of the silent era. Between 1985 and 1990 he produced wildly varying work, ranging from disposable hardcore porn to a clutch of reasonably budgeted, conventionally structured French movies with stars like Christopher Lee and Mark Hamill. Between 1990 and 1996, however, his career lay fallow, leading many to assume that he'd retired. A 'comeback' picture, *Killer Barbys* (1996), put paid to that scurrilous rumour, and such was his indefatigable energy that a further deluge of shot-on-video projects, financed chiefly by fans of his cinema work, followed in its wake.

Jess Franco died in Málaga on Tuesday 2nd April 2013 at the age of 82, leaving behind a vast body of work comprising over 180 movies. Tirelessly addicted to the creation of his own voyeuristically charged screen universe, he quite literally lived to shoot. Even after the death of his beloved muse and long-term partner Lina Romay in February 2012, he fought back and mounted yet more productions, including *Al Pereira vs. the Alligator Ladies*, which premiered in Barcelona just a fortnight before his death. In the book that you hold in your hands, we will examine the films Franco directed between his light-hearted debut *Tenemos 18 años* ("We Are 18") in 1959 and the shocking and pivotal *Exorcism* in 1974. Volume Two will pick up the story from 1975, covering films from *Juliette 69* (1975) to *Revenge of the Alligator Ladies* (2013).

There will of course be many who question why even one volume should be given over to discussing Jess Franco. For much of his career he was reviled, dismissed, mocked and berated in the press; his work was deemed sloppy, full of glaring technical shortcomings and corner-cutting laziness. If you came across him in film guides and news-stand movie magazines you would find him described contemptuously as the lowest sort of hack. It was left to European sex film magazines specialising in continental erotic cinema to give him a fair shake in the 1970s, with perceptive writers like Alain Petit and Jean-Pierre Bouyxou in the vanguard. Although numerous books and articles in the last twenty years have sought to redress the balance (beginning with the lavish hardback study *Obsession* by Lucas Balbo, Peter Blumenstock & Christian Kessler, which changed the terrain forever in 1993), it's fair to say that prior to Phil Hardy's *Aurum Encyclopedia: Horror* in 1985, and American critic Tim Lucas's groundbreaking work for *Fangoria* in the late 1980s, little of any insight or positivity was written about Franco in scholarly, mainstream or genre publications. The situation was made worse for many years by the less than ideal selection of Franco films on video. The unavailability of great swathes of his best work meant that critics and viewers formed their negative opinions on the basis of easily available films like *Oasis of the Zombies* or *The*

*Cannibals*, among the shoddiest Franco ever directed, or else they were seeing his better films chopped up with material he never intended (gurning zombie idiots spliced into the poetic *A Virgin among the Living Dead* for instance), or reduced from their original widescreen format into unwatchable slivers by atrocious video releases (*Female Vampire*). But this is, admittedly, a sort of special pleading. It's by no means certain that seeing a string of the better films would immediately lift any hypothetical scales from the eyes of sceptics. Even the best Franco films come with all manner of loose ends and oddball idiosyncrasies trailing. You have to learn to love the uneven construction and enjoy the aesthetic whiplash that assails you, as scenes of infernal elegance cut to moments of staggering absurdity.

There's something about the notion of the 'artist-maudit' that stirs the blood of film fanatics; we adore the thrill of the forbidden, we get off on the anti-glamour of the reviled, the rejected and despised. There's a lot of fun to be had with this approach, but in Franco's case there's much more to applaud than mere 'outsider' status. In fact it's the view of this writer that Jess Franco was a true artist, and I hope that this book will assert that view forcefully and persuasively. One of the cinema's great individualists, he gave to us a torrent of maverick works in which, despite woefully small budgets, it is frequently possible to discern the hand of a cinéaste and an aesthete.

Dedicated fans adore the impetuous, punkish spontaneity of his work, but sceptics, for the same reason, find him hard to take seriously. Franco shot his films in a whirlwind of impulse, like a cartoon Tasmanian Devil with a movie camera, and the results veer from controlled chaos to devil-may-care randomness. Many of his most astonishing films bear hallmarks that would appal the sober-minded student of classical film style. But while perfect craft may have fallen by the wayside, Franco's breakneck speed unleashes a blizzard of extraordinary sensations and images. There's something truly otherworldly about his films: they give us precious glimpses of a stranger, more delirious reality. Jess Franco was, if you like, the anti-Kubrick – impulsive, impatient, always in a hurry – but he shared with the master procrastinator one special quality; a cinematic vision as distinct and unique as a retinal photograph.

There are certain filmmakers whose work occupies such a personal, intimate space that it could never be mistaken for anyone else's, people whose very name conjures a particular shade of aesthetic refinement. Pretty much anyone interested in cinema has a good idea of what you mean if you say that something is 'Lynchian' or 'Felliniesque' because these artists stamp the intricate detail of their psyche into their work. Then there are craftsmen, whose expert contributions can be thrilling and enjoyable but who approach cinema with no personal demons to express, preferring simply to make decent functional contributions to an already existing format. When it comes to filmmakers who work primarily in genre, the distinction between art and craft can be difficult to call. Genre, after all, pre-exists individual style. That's not to say



that 'genre artists' don't exist. The difference between a genre craftsman and a genre artist is the difference between someone happy to follow the rules of the game, and someone for whom the rules can be bent into whichever shape they desire. A genre artist does not simply adhere to the accepted template; he or she will keep what they like and discard the rest, adapting, cross-pollinating, mutating, deforming, obliterating, working not just the clay but the mould itself. It is by such a standard that we can begin to understand Jess Franco, an artist whose disdain for the limits of genre has birthed some of the most extraordinary and individual movies in the fields of horror, eroticism, and beyond.

So where to start? Franco's output beckons the curious with its sheer cumulative density; it's not unusual for fans to say things like, 'I've only seen thirty so far' or 'I've seen a hundred but it's not enough'. Tim Lucas aced the trend in the inaugural edition of his magazine *Video Watchdog* (1990) with the mind-boggling statement, "You can't see one Franco film until you've seen them all." It sounds crazy – but he had a point. Franco's work is best seen as a borderless continuum rippling with recurring themes, individual films less important than the wider trends and currents passing through. Watching a single Franco film is like sipping a glass of water from a brimming lake; to really enjoy what he has to offer you have to throw yourself in. One of the difficulties faced by the curious viewer is the sheer wealth of available options. Franco is now one of, if not *the* most widely represented of film directors on DVD and Blu-ray. Add to this the headache caused by a torrent of wildly differing international versions of the films; cut ones here, extended versions there, films re-edited and redubbed, recast and reshuffled, more sex, no sex, hardcore sex, new characters, new dialogue, entirely different plots depending on which version you see... This bewildering proliferation is matched by a jumble of conflicting information about the films; scholarship on Franco's work may have come on leaps and bounds but still there is wrong or questionable or conflicting information everywhere you look. Some of it is down to the Internet Movie Database, which allows casual users to add information without provenance. Another instigator of unreliable information was Jess Franco himself. Quite understandably his memory sometimes failed him, although it happened a lot less frequently than one might expect. As for the film prints, they're frequently a nightmare for scholarship: certain key titles offer as few as five or six cast names, leading to a plethora of guess-work. This book aims to deal only in verified facts, and where speculation is offered it's noted as such.

#### A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF THE MAZE

What kind of overview can we seek, as we approach this maze of celluloid? For a start, how many films are we actually talking about? Some commentators put the tally at over 200, others around 170. Given that it helps to know the dimensions of a mountain before scaling it, if we put aside variants drawn from

the same initial footage (such as *Le Miroir obscène*, the sexed up French re-edit of Franco's 1973 horror film *Al otro lado del espejo*), and narrow the field to commercially released films directed solely by Franco (thus excluding such as the unreleased/unfinished 1982 Edgar Wallace adaptation *Voces de muerte* or 1975's *Une cage dorée*, a film directed by Marius Lesoeur which Franco helped to finish), there are, in total, 173 different feature films to consider. Of these, approximately 56 are horror films (that's allowing for a fairly generous definition of horror). Beyond that, the calculations are more difficult. Genre is an unstable boundary in Franco's work; detective mysteries are suffused with explicit eroticism (*Les ébranlées*), brutal sex dramas shade into horror (*Ilsa the Wicked Warden*). Franco's chief hallmark is sex, often perverse or sadistic, but his films are only occasionally 'porno films' per se. So bearing in mind that some of you may dispute the precise point at which a crime drama with lots of sex becomes a sex film, or a sex film about torture and degradation becomes a horror film, my rough guide to Franco's genre landscape is as follows:

- 56 horror films (the supernatural, monsters, or multiple murder)
- 42 crime films (criminal exploits, spies, crime fighters)
- 39 sex dramas (dramas involving frequent erotic situations)
- 18 porn films (films in which the primary element is sex)
- 13 adventures (heroic tales, picaresque stories)
- 02 musicals (dramas with numerous songs performed by the cast)
- 02 experimental films (foregrounding formal experimentation)
- 01 historical drama (in this case about the Nazi period)

After noting the surprising number of crime stories (ranging from film noirs like *Rififi en la ciudad* to spy spoofs like *Lucky the Inscrutable*), it will come as no surprise to anyone even casually aware of Franco that horror and sex are the most prominent genre landmarks in his cinema. In fact they're more like the same landmark, yielding different facets depending on where you stand or what sort of light is shining. In fact so persistent is Franco's confluence of horror and eroticism that reviewers and fans have often tried to mint a special word for his films: *horrotica*. It's a valid ambition, to create a bespoke genre label capable of embracing such morbid sexual stories as *Lorna... the Exorcist*, *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein*, *Vampyros Lesbos* or *Female Vampire*. The only reason I don't embrace the term is... I don't like it. It looks ugly written down and sounds clumsy when you say it. Frustratingly there are no suitable variations either, so we're left with the term 'erotic horror', which will have to do.

This focus on labelling may seem trivial, but on the contrary it elucidates a striking feature running throughout Franco's work. His approach to genre, to the rules and regulations governing categories of content and style, is wilfully unpredictable, capriciously mutable, playfully ironic and irreverent, all of which aligns him very much with the postmodern sensibility. Franco's keen sense of juxtaposition, his unwillingness (which grows stronger throughout



his career) to grant the rules of one genre primacy over another, his use of 'inappropriate' wit and comedy, his amoral non-judgemental narratives, his mobilisation (especially in the Sadean films) of mutually exclusive moral/amoral viewpoints, indicates a director who sees life as having no fixed centre, no assured hierarchy of meaning. His fondness for artistic material already partly moulded by the hands of others, as seen in the nest of 'influences' making up his debut horror film *The Awful Dr. Orlof*, or the delirious collision of vampires, monsters and werewolves in *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein* (the whole thing modelled on the carnivalesque horror pile-ups of Erle C. Kenton) puts his work in the category of 'genre cinema', but his willingness to distort and displace that material, to play with its rules, takes him closer to 'art cinema'. This tendency in his work, towards appropriation and collage, is acutely self-conscious, being both indulged and auto-satirised in his 'art-horror' film *Succubus*.

In addition, although he rejected religion in his teens and happily embraced his status as a 'public enemy' in the eyes of Spain's Catholic Church, alongside such famous atheists as Luis Buñuel, Franco nevertheless refused the atheistic doctrine of materialism and instead revelled in the fantastic. Ghosts, monsters, demons, vampires, walking corpses, appear frequently in his cinema (in one case the Devil himself puts in an appearance). It's as though he considers the rationalist project of the Enlightenment to be as much of a menace to free thought as the Church and its policing of desire. The name of the game in Franco's work is freedom, which includes the freedom to depict whatever he likes, and to posit whatever illogical collision of sense and non-sense he finds appealing. His films are a riot of 'spooky action at a distance' (to borrow out of context Einstein's famous objection to quantum physics); he adopts a sardonic satirical mindset, takes a fervently non-Christian approach to desire and morality, and yet he also maintains a Romantic notion of mind, involving not so much a soul in the immortal sense as the extension of thought into 'astral' or psychic realms beyond all known physical laws.

To prepare for a journey into the many worlds of Jess Franco, this chapter will firstly elucidate aspects of Franco's early life and establish a basic chronology, before mapping the trajectory of his career from the 1950s to the mid-1970s. Pausing to consider Franco in two different contexts, British film exhibition and Spanish horror cinema, I then move on to discuss the perceived controversial or problematic qualities of his work, after which – having I hope laid a few myths and criticisms to rest – I discuss some of the major themes and influences in his cinema.

#### THE EARLY YEARS

Jesús Franco Manera was born on Monday the 12th May 1930, one of seven children (from oldest to youngest: Dolores, Ricardo, Enrique, José, Gloria, Jesús and Javier). His parents, Emilio Franco Martín and Dolores Manera Custardoy, were well-educated

and liberal (Emilio was a physician and radiologist), and they expected a degree of intellectual or cultural commitment from their offspring: sure enough, some of the family went on to become esteemed musicians, others were intellectuals or philosophers, while Ricardo followed his father into medicine. Music attracted Jesús very early on in life, with the piano his first port of call. His older brother Enrique, already a pianist of great ability, intervened one day after hearing him hammering full-throttle at the keyboard and offered to teach him the rudiments of music to prevent him from 'murdering' the instrument.<sup>2</sup> This led to a lifelong love affair with music, especially jazz, that would feed directly into his cinema. Meanwhile the primary influence on his intellectual development was his older sister Dolores, who schooled him in literature and took responsibility for his cultural education.<sup>3</sup>

Jesús Franco made his most important decision in life in the late 1940s, abandoning his studies in Philosophy and Law and turning towards the Arts. A career in music was considered but rejected as impractical; having made a few sorties into the world of jazz, playing trumpet in Spanish bars, he soon realised the financial rewards were meagre. Although music would always remain a vital force in his life, he took a pragmatic decision and focussed his attention on film. He studied theatre in Madrid and Paris, and attended film courses at the Instituto de Investigaciones y Experiencias Cinematográficas (IIEC), Spain's first ever film school, set up in 1947. However he found his studies boring and bailed out after sitting two years of a three year course. If we are to take his word for it, he then wrote around fifteen pulp novels in the late 1940s and early 1950s, using various pseudonyms and receiving five thousand pesetas per book. None of these books have ever turned up, which leaves us to wonder if they really exist; as the story of Jess Franco unfolds, similar doubts will occur in other contexts as we begin to realise that the sly and puckish Jess Franco was not always truth's biggest fan!

A voracious film viewer, Franco fed his obsession with innumerable treks into France to see the sort of films the Spanish censor refused to allow. As he explained to Kevin Collins and Hugh Gallagher, "*I was in the School of Cinema in Madrid at the time, in a period of terrible censorship in Spain. I realized I could not be a movie director without knowing a lot of important films made in the whole world, films that were forbidden in Spain. So I decided to go to France - to Paris. I knew about the French cinémathèque and I saw the programs showing three or four films per day - very interesting, most of them. And most of them I hadn't seen. So I went there with enough money to stay a couple of weeks and I wound up staying three-and-a-half years!*"<sup>4</sup>

He first entered the film industry in 1953, thanks to his mentor Juan Antonio Bardem, one of the titans of post-War Spanish cinema. Bardem, who at the time was himself just starting out, offered Franco a job as assistant director on his film *Cómicos* (shot in 1953 and released in '54).<sup>5</sup> This was actually Bardem's second film but his first as sole director; his previous film *Esa pareja feliz*, made in 1951 when he was fresh out of film school (IIEC), had

been co-directed with Luis García Berlanga, although it didn't find release until 1953 when Bardem and Berlanga became hot property after writing the highly regarded *Bienvenido Mister Marshall* (which Berlanga also directed). Franco held Bardem in high esteem and felt personally indebted to him, as he explained to Spanish film critic Álex Mendibil, "*Juan Antonio Bardem is the one to whom I owe the most. He gave me a job as his assistant back when I was a nobody. I didn't even have a permit to work, any shit like that. I think Juan Antonio liked me so much, above all, for political reasons. I was a Marxist, something that opened some doors for me and, of course, closed some others: there was no way the right-wing could stomach me.*"<sup>6</sup>

Having proved his mettle on the Bardem film, Franco spent the next five years working in various capacities on a wide variety of projects, including comedies, westerns, thrillers and romantic melodramas. In 1954, while working as assistant director on *El Coyote* and *La justicia del Coyote*, two westerns shot simultaneously by Joaquín Luis Romero Marchent after the original director Fernando Soler dropped out, Franco stepped in and rewrote the scripts on set, a chaotic situation that nevertheless demonstrated his ability to cope with the unexpected. Following this he was signed up as second assistant director on Juan Antonio Bardem's comedy *Felices pascuas* ('Happy Easter', 1954) and in 1955 supervised the Spanish dubbing of the French film *La Môme vert de gris* (made in 1953 but released in Spain November 1955) starring his future collaborators Eddie Constantine and Howard Vernon. Among a plethora of assignments during this period Franco was assistant director on León Klimovsky's *Viaje de novios* (1956) and *Miedo* (1956), the latter of which he also co-wrote, as well as Luis García Berlanga's comedically irrereligious *Los jueves, milagro* (1957) and Ramón Comas's *Historias de Madrid* (1957)<sup>7</sup>, the latter of which he also scored. Franco also co-scripted, and acted as production manager, on Pedro Lazaga's successful comedy *Luna de verano* (a story about two girlfriends on holiday together that contains the seeds of several future Franco projects), after which he took an acting role and production manager credit on Lazaga's *Ana dice sí* (1958) and wrote Klimovsky's *Llegaron los franceses* (1959).<sup>8</sup>

During this period, one particular experience stuck in Franco's mind. In an interview with Carlos Tejeda in 2006 he explained: "*One day [Luis] Berlanga told me something, when I was his assistant. We were doing Los jueves, milagro and every ten days the censors would send a new message saying 'You must cut this and cut that.' Luis was desperate, and in one of those very serious moments, meditating while shooting in the studio, he said to me, 'Don't kid yourself – to make good movies you need two things that neither you nor I have: one is a wonderful camera and other is freedom.'*"<sup>9</sup> It was a statement so powerful that the ripples would extend throughout Franco's career...

#### THE SHORT FILMS

In the midst of these assignments Franco quietly honed his directorial abilities with a handful of short film essays. The first,

*El árbol de España* ('The Tree of Spain', 1957), was a 16-minute documentary about Spanish olive growing, co-scripted by José María Forqué, with whom Franco would later collaborate on *Al otro lado del espejo* (1973). Made in 35mm colour, *El árbol de España* featured Paco de Ronda and Amparo Renkel – both of whom Franco probably met when he worked with them on León Klimovsky's 1956 thriller *Miedo* – and Magdalena Castro, a chanteuse who'd appeared in Joaquín Luis Romero Marchent's *El hombre que viajaba despacito* (1957), which Franco assistant-directed. All three actors appeared in the short as themselves, presumably in some kind of 'vox-pop' set-up expressing their enthusiasm for the Spanish olive industry. Sadly, no detailed record is currently available, but a feature in a Spanish newspaper on 27 February 1966 announced that the film formed part of a major promotional campaign by the National Union of Olive-Growers to raise awareness of Spanish olive products in the USA. The piece also states that the film is thought to have been seen by as many as eight million Americans, which raises the very real possibility that *El árbol de España* is the most widely seen Jess Franco film of all time!

The second of Franco's shorts, *Estampas Guipúzcoanas No.2 (Pío Baroja)* ('Gipuzkoan Prints No.2 (Pío Baroja)', 1958), was more ambitious; a 27-minute documentary, or poetic essay, on the recently deceased Spanish novelist Pío Baroja.<sup>10</sup> The title refers to the region of Spain where Baroja lived and worked, then known as Guipúzcoa (now officially referred to in Spain under its Basque spelling Gipuzkoa), a province of Spain (and historical territory of the Basque Country) the capital city of which is San Sebastián. According to Álex Mendibil, who viewed the film at the Spanish Cinemateque, it is "*a collection of pictures and landscapes of the San Sebastián area, photographed and framed with preciousity and accompanied by a voice-over that mixes fragments of Baroja's work with biographical notes.*"<sup>11</sup> While *Estampas Guipúzcoanas No.2 (Pío Baroja)* is currently unavailable commercially, Mendibil was thankfully able to reproduce a few frames on the website 'Franconomicon'. Viewing these out of context it's impossible for me to say very much, except to note that they reveal a keen eye for spatial composition in relation to landscape. The cameraman on the project, Eloy Mella, was camera operator on Luis García Berlanga's pivotal 1953 Spanish comedy *Bienvenido Mister Marshall* and would go on to shoot Franco's first feature *Tenemos 18 años* and his comedy musical *Vampiresas 1930*.

The subject of the film, Pío Baroja (1872–1956), was born in the coastal town of San Sebastián in Northern Spain. He's best known internationally for 'La lucha por la vida' (The Struggle for Life, 1922–1924), an unflinching depiction of life in Madrid's slums, and 'El árbol de la ciencia' (The Tree of Knowledge, 1911), a pessimistic coming-of-age story in which the writer argues for the futility of the pursuit of knowledge and of life in general. According to his Wikipedia entry, "*Baroja often wrote in a pessimistic, picaresque style ... [His] works were often lively, but could be lacking in plot and are written in an abrupt, vivid, yet impersonal style.*" It is worth bearing in

mind these adjectives, describing a writer Franco admired, as we approach his early feature films. Also worth remarking upon is the fact that *Estampas Guipúzcoanas No.2 (Pío Baroja)* won the prize for Best Spanish Language Short Film at the 1960 San Sebastián Film Festival, an occasion to which Franco alluded, with some irony, when speaking to *El País* in November 2008 about his forthcoming Goya award. The film was shown on the Spanish national TV station 1a Cadena, on the 14th July 1982.

Franco's next directorial experiment was *El destierro del Cid* ('The Exile of Cid', 1958), a fifteen minute short based on an anonymous poem called 'Poema del mio Cid' about the life and deeds of the 11th Century Spanish war hero Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, better known as 'El Cid'. Shot in 35mm colour by Juan Mariné, it was produced by Álamo Films and featured the voices of Francisco Arenzana, Valeriano Andrés and Celia Onrubio. (Given that Álamo Films were only ever credited with producing Franco's shorts and co-producing his second feature *Labios rojos*, it seems fair to assume that this was Franco's own production company at the time.) Adaptation of the verse is credited to 'Javier Roy' although I've been unable to confirm who this is. Could it be Jess Franco's earliest recorded pseudonym, or perhaps the contribution of his younger brother Javier? As for style and content, little is known about this very obscure work...

Even less is known about *Las playas vacías* ('The Empty Beaches', 1958), made shortly before Franco directed his first feature film, except that it once again featured the voice of Francisco Arenzana (an actor and dubbing artist who'd worked on *El destierro del Cid* and was best known at the time for providing the Spanish voice of Humphrey Bogart). Running twelve minutes, and written entirely by Franco, it remains utterly obscure. All that can be said is that it must have been made off the back of Franco's good relationship with the producers of Pedro Lazaga's *Luna de verano*, which he'd recently co-written; *Las playas vacías* was apparently a co-production between Álamo Films and Ágata Films S.A., the latter being producers of the Lazaga movie.

The fifth and last of Franco's shorts strikes me as a dubious title in his filmography. Ostensibly another short film about the olive growing industry, *Oro Español* ('Spanish Gold, 1960) is so similar in so many details to the earlier *El árbol de España* that I suspect it's actually the same film under a new title. Both are shot by Godofredo Pacheco, both are co-written by Franco, José María Forqué, Rafael García Serrano and Luis Patac, and both feature the voice talents of Lola Cervantes. *El árbol de España* runs fifteen minutes; *Oro Español* runs sixteen. Quite apart from the unlikelihood of a four-way writing team reconvening to write a second script about olives, notice that while *El árbol de España* is credited as produced by the National Union of Olive-Growers, *Oro Español* retains their credit but adds Espiral Films, a production company with previous experience handling documentary shorts. I suspect that *El árbol de España* was simply bought up by Espiral and then retitled *Oro Español*.

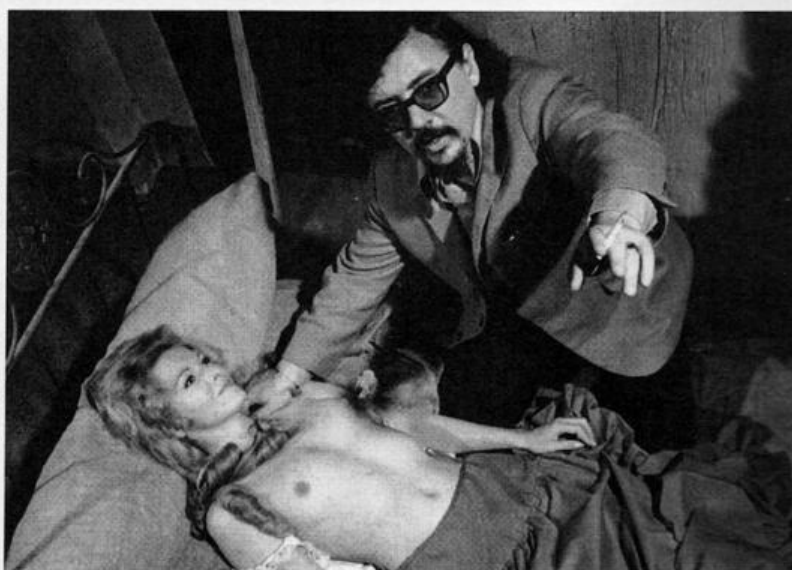
## THE FEATURE FILMS 1959 TO 1974

In 1959, with a formidable array of screen credits under his belt, Franco at last secured funding to direct his first feature film. The story, an experimental comedy called *Tenemos 18 años*, was produced by Luis Berlanga's short-lived Auster Films, who'd previously financed Franco's award-winning short about Pío Baroja. It was followed a year later by *Labios rojos*, a thriller about a pair of female private investigators. A job stepping in for an indisposed León Klimovsky on a ritzy musical, *La reina del Tabarin* (1960), followed by a brisk Hollywood-inspired musical comedy, *Vampiresas 1930* (1961), saw Franco attract modest but professionally useful plaudits from the critics which helped to establish him as a safe pair of hands, but this was as nothing next to the boost he received from his fifth film as director. 1961's *Gritos en la noche* (sold abroad as *The Awful Dr. Orlof*) was a ghoulish tale starring the debonair Howard Vernon (whom Franco remembered from *La Môme vert de gris*), mixing Gothic horror with echoes of Franju's sensational French shocker *Eyes without a Face*. A roaring success, it catapulted him into the international film markets and kick-started his career in horror. It also consolidated his relationship with French producer Marius Lesoeur and his company Eurociné, who had co-produced *La reina del Tabarin* and would score a sizeable hit with *Orlof* in France. After a brief diversion back into screenwriting (Joaquín Luis Romero Marchent's 1962 adventure film *La venganza del Zorro*) Franco added another string to his bow with the lustrous noir-inflected crime drama *La muerte silba un blues* (1962). Horror came calling again with *La mano de un hombre muerto* aka *The Sadistic Baron von Klaus* (1962) but Franco was still hungry to explore other genres: he followed it with *Rififi en la ciudad* (1963), a deluxe refinement of his film-noir ambitions, and then essayed his one and only contribution to the burgeoning western cycle, *El Llanero* (1963). After making a follow-up of sorts to *The Awful Dr. Orlof*, the brooding and melancholy *Dr. Orloff's Monster* (1964), Franco took on an acting assignment playing the retarded brother in a troubled family in *El extraño viaje* (1964) directed by the star of *Rififi en la ciudad*, Fernando Fernán Gómez. It gained him a few decent notices and, more importantly, provided him with a character-type to which he would return again and again in his work during the 1970s and 80s.

A chance encounter with the legendary Orson Welles in 1964 led to Franco being invited to shoot second unit on *Chimes at Midnight* that year. Franco, a huge fan of Welles, was thrilled. A jealous rival tried to scupper this dream assignment by whispering to Welles that he should watch a recent 'abomination' by Franco, *Rififi en la ciudad*: however Welles saw the film and loved it (not least for its obvious Wellesian touches), and the two became friends, with Franco also assisting on the American genius's *Treasure Island* (an unfinished project). Soon after, he directed his fourth horror film, *Miss Muerte* aka *The Diabolical Dr. Z* (1965), co-written with







Luis Buñuel's regular scriptwriter Jean-Claude Carrière. This gorgeously atmospheric offering initiated a theme that would run and run through Franco's work; a female under the psychic control of a malevolent Svengali committing a string of murders against her will. *The Diabolical Dr. Z* was twinned with another production made for the same producers, *Cartas boca arriba* aka *Attack of the Robots* (1965). It hitched a ride on the superspy craze and scored commercial success in Spain and France thanks to the presence of American actor Eddie Constantine, a Continental screen sensation at the time. Franco's immediate follow-up, *Residencia para espías* aka *Golden Horn* (1966), re-booked Constantine, but ran into production difficulties and failed to really connect with an audience. His third stab at a spy comedy, *Lucky the Inscrutable* (1966), was his most ambitious production so far, in terms of finance, and saw him widening the net to include Italian co-production. However the film was not a big success and further Italian funding dried up.

Not to be deterred, Franco turned his attention to West Germany, striking a three picture deal with a production company called Aquila, run by German actor/director Adrian Hoven, French actor/director Michel Lemoine and Italian actor/playboy Pier Caminnci. The first of the Aquila films would radically transform Franco's career. *Necronomicon* aka *Succubus* (1967) was a hallucinatory infusion of art cinema head-games and erotic thrills, about a nightclub performance artist manipulated into murder by a mysterious Svengali: its languid, oneiric texture, mid-way between art and sexploitation, would provide a template for much of his best work in the future. However its sadomasochistic explicitness brought Franco into conflict with the Spanish censors, who refused to believe he'd shot it all abroad: consequently, financing in his homeland became increasingly difficult to obtain. The remaining two Aquila films, *El caso de las dos bellezas* aka *Sadisterotica* and *Bésame monstruo* aka *Kiss Me Monster*, were less controversial. Madcap crime and espionage comedies, they returned to the theme of *Labios rojos*: a pair of female sleuths working to their own code of ethics, foxing both cops and criminals.

At this point in his career, with Spanish money harder to come by, Franco needed a powerful new ally, and as luck would have it he found one in the shape of British movie entrepreneur Harry Alan Towers. Franco first got to know Towers when the latter drafted him in at short notice to rescue a Jeremy Summers project (1967's *The Face of Eve*) that had fallen into difficulties. Proving himself a good man in a tight spot, Franco got on well with his new friend and the two discovered they had a great deal in common. Both men wanted to push the boundaries of the sexual revolution, and Towers, who wrote his own screenplays but didn't direct, realised that he had found the ideal director to turn his crude but provocative scenarios into saleable film shockers. Between 1967 and 1970 Franco shot nine films for Towers, including *The Blood of Fu Manchu* (1967), *The Girl from Rio* (1968), *99 Women* (1968), *Marquis de Sade's "Justine"* (1968), *The Castle of Fu Manchu* (1968), *Eugenie... the Story of her Journey into Perversion* (1969) and *Count*

*Dracula* (1969). The biggest and boldest by far was *The Bloody Judge* (1969) starring Christopher Lee, a handsomely shot, well acted costume drama with sadistic horror elements. And yet the best film Franco made during his Towers tenure was a private little oddity called *Vénus in Furs* (1968), a sui-generis poetic fantasy made far more cheaply than the others. Heavily infused by Franco's love of jazz, *Venus in Furs*, like *Succubus* before it, showed Franco to be more than a sensationalist purveyor of sleaze; instead it created a puzzling, melancholy dream space in which dislocation and mystery predominated.

*Venus in Furs* seemed to loosen something in Franco because in 1969, with the example of financial card-sharp Towers to inspire him, he began to experiment with producing his own films. The first two to emerge from this DIY approach were *Les Cauchemars naissent la nuit* aka *Nightmares Come at Night* (1969) and *Sex Charade* (1969), chalked up to a company based in Liechtenstein called Prodif Ets. The same company later sired two quite extraordinary Franco classics, *Eugenie* (1970) and *A Virgin among the Living Dead* (1971). However, Prodif Ets. never put their name to another filmmaker's product, so was this in fact Franco's own company, cannily set up in Harry Towers's favourite tax haven, Liechtenstein? It seems very likely. A year later Franco went legit with a production company officially registered in Spain called Films Manacoa P.C., under which umbrella many more of his films would emerge, ranging from the low-budget giallo *Un silencio de tumba* to a torrent of ultra-cheap and highly variable 1980s productions (*Camino solitario*; *Los blues de la calle Pop*, *Bahia blanca*, *Las chicas del tanga*, etc).

In 1970, having experienced difficulties with Towers and unwelcome pressure from his American backers, Franco swapped producers again, searching for greater artistic freedom and new financial opportunities. After squeezing in a brief business lunch with his old friends Eurociné, who provided finishing funds for his brilliant and disturbing serial-killer drama *Eugenie*, Franco hooked up with Artur Brauner and his well-established German company CCC Filmkunst, delivering six pictures in twelve months: the justly celebrated *Vampyros Lesbos* (1970), the intermittently marvellous *She Killed in Ecstasy* (1970), the frantically convoluted *The Devil Came from Akasava* (1970), the cheap and cheerful *X312 - Flight to Hell* (1970), the visually striking *El muerto hace las maletas* (1971), the dog's dinner with psychedelic knobs on *La venganza del doctor Mabuse* (1971), plus, for Brauner's offshoot company Tele-cine Film-und Fernsehproduktion, an oddball pseudo-documentary *Jungfrauen-Report* (1971) and a cheesy sex comedy *Robinson und seine wilden Sklavinnen* (1971). The latter, a German-French co-production, brought Franco into the orbit of Parisian sex film specialist Robert de Nesle, whose Comptoir Français du Film Production (CFFP) would produce or co-produce twenty-three Franco films in the next ten years. Franco revived his relationship with Eurociné too; they would finance, co-finance, or take over the release of twenty-three Franco films between 1971 and 1989.



With relaxed censorship gaining pace around the world, a demon seemed to possess Franco. He drastically accelerated production, completing six films in 1971, eight in 1972, and eleven in 1973. Shooting schedules blurred together, the camera rarely left Franco's arms, and his life began to morph into the equivalent of Bob Dylan's 'Never Ending Tour'. From this riot of capricious creativity, with its furious haste and some fast-and-loose business practises, came *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein* (1971), *Dracula's Daughter* (1972), *Devil's Island Lovers* (1972), *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein* (1972), *The Demons* (1972), *Un capitán de quince años* (1972), *Les Ébranlées* (1972), *Sinner: The Secret Diary of a Nymphomaniac* (1972), *The Sinister Eyes of Dr. Orloff* (1973), *How to Seduce a Virgin* (1973), *Countess Perverse* (1973), *Maciste contre la reine des Amazones* (1973), *Les Exploits érotiques de Maciste dans l'Atlantide* aka *Les Gloutonnes* (1973), *Al otro lado del espejo* (1973), *La Comtesse noire* aka *Female Vampire* (1973), *Night of the Skull* (1973), *The Hot Nights of Linda* (1973), *Tender and Perverse Emanuelle* (1973), *Kiss Me Killer* (1973), *Célestine, An All Round Maid* (1974), *Lorna... the Exorcist* (1974), *Les Chatouilleuses* (1974), *Le Jouisseur* (1974), *Les Grandes Emmerdeuses* (1974), and *Exorcism* (1974), the best of which twist reality and fantasy, desire and illusion, Eros and Thanatos, into dark and beguiling new forms. Although a hell of a lot rougher than the early films, held together with spit, sellotape and a hyperactive zoom lens, the highlights of this period are among the most potent drafts in Franco's cine-apothecary, and they form the basis of his reputation among lovers of aesthetic exoticism.

### ZOOM!

Before we go on, there's something we need to get out of the way. If there's one thing that critics of Jess Franco love to bring up, time and time again, it's his 'over-use' of the zoom lens, a technical device frequently regarded as cheap, crude, ugly and unsophisticated. Certainly, amid the multitude of zoom shots in Franco's long career, there are a few that even I would like to see excised, but in principle I disagree entirely with those who use the technique as a stick to beat the filmmaker. For me, Franco's zooms are an essential part of his style, a vital contribution to the grammar of his cinema, and an aesthetic fingerprint of considerable eccentric charm.

The device in question is a mechanical assembly of lens elements for which the focal length can be varied on a sliding scale (the term 'focal length' refers to the distance at which an object appears to be in focus when seen through the lens). Zoom lenses are used in many different technical arenas: still cameras, video cameras, motion picture cameras, projectors, binoculars, microscopes, telescopes, rifle sights, all employ a variant of the zoom. A true zoom lens allows focal length to be varied while keeping the image in focus throughout (a lens that loses focus during zooming is more properly called varifocal). It was patented in the USA in

1902, and the first commercially available versions for 35mm movie cameras appeared in 1932. However, early zoom lenses had difficulty maintaining focus, and it was not until 1956 that a French engineer, Pierre Angenieux, made precise zoom focus possible, thanks to a mechanical compensation system which won him a technical award in 1964 from the Academy of Motion Pictures.

Since then numerous directors, including many with serious international reputations, have employed the zoom as an aesthetic tool. Stanley Kubrick, Nicolas Roeg, Ken Russell, Brian De Palma, Robert Altman, Martin Scorsese – all have applied the zoom lens with often gleeful energy. It can be used slowly, to mimic a tracking shot, rapidly, for shock emphasis, or rhythmically, to energise a shot with psychedelic vivacity.

That's all very well, you're probably thinking, but isn't it also a short-cut for low budget filmmakers who can't afford to plan and execute fancy tracking shots? The answer of course is yes. A zoom is a quick, economical way to create movement when you can't afford to lay down tracks and send the camera flying around the set. Not everyone has Brian De Palma's budgets to play with. I don't think it's fanciful to see a parallel between Franco's use of the zoom lens and the use of bar-chords in punk rock – they may lack sophistication, but they get the job done quickly and convey a rough vital energy. Perhaps if Jess Franco had been blessed with bigger budgets his films would be full of long, sinuous tracking shots with hardly a zoom in sight. (More likely he would have created thirty films with the same money, and dined out heartily on the remaining cash...)

There are critics who regard the zoom as somehow tainted *a priori* because it doesn't mimic the action of the human eye. This strikes me as quite ludicrous and hardly worth mentioning, but there it is. We've invented a technological device that exceeds the ability of the human eye, and that's supposed to be a *bad* thing? Instead let's examine the positive aspects of this maligned device. The zoom lens allows the operator to choose details and speed us towards them. It's propulsive; it changes the way we approach the image, and if one needs some sort of Brechtian excuse, then look at it this way – the zoom lens, by doing something that the human eye cannot, reminds us that what we are experiencing is not real, but mediated by the hands of others. Franco takes one of the most glaring technical signals of unreality and uses it again and again, riffing on its artificiality and shamelessly exploiting it. Another interesting side-effect of the zoom is that it not only alters focal length, it also changes the angle of view. This curious effect can be seen by filming three shots of the same object, with the camera positioned at the same point, with the zoom lens set at differing focal lengths. Take, for instance, an object seen in perspective, such as a building whose facade recedes from view: the angle by which the perspective recedes will change according to the three different zoom positions. Franco's cinema is replete with shots that close, foreshorten, flatten out or distend the angle of view in this way,

and it plays an essential role in his disorientating manipulation of filmic space.

However, while the zoom lens can indeed jolt the viewer into awareness of cinema artifice, and fragment or manipulate point of view, Franco is not always so seriously inclined. It would be pretentious to concentrate exclusively on artistic intent when the device is primarily a practical tool to compensate for lack of time and money. Nevertheless, over the years Franco grew to like it for its own sake, embracing it as an integral component of his style. For the viewer the zoom's insistent probing of the image forges a conspiratorial alliance between the director's roving eye and our own gaze. There is, after all, a sensual quality to the zoom. It's not simply about the significance of the image that we zoom towards; it's about the sensation of zooming itself. In Franco the sliding of focal length is an essential part of the pleasure. One cannot help but see the sexual connotations! If one is fixated purely on orgasm then sex will soon become tiresome, inertial, plagued by ennui. But if one focusses upon the journey to orgasm, the sexual universe expands to limitless horizons. Much of Franco's *oeuvre* is built upon a sensual dalliance with time, a dance with deferral through extended scenes that encourage the viewer to lose sight of mundane reality. Just as sex can draw us into a world of ecstatic suspension, where the quotidian details of time and space are in abeyance, so the zoom lens shifts us smoothly through space and time, transporting us from landscape to detail without the camera itself moving an inch, propelling us beyond the normal topological and temporal rules. The zoom is erotic!

Once we learn to regard the zoom as something with charm in and of itself, and not just a labour-saving device, it begins to speak to our imaginations. And it's the notion of imagination that conveys my final argument in favour of Jess Franco's zooms; while the human eye cannot zoom, the human imagination certainly can. In everyday erotic experience our imagination zooms, even as our eyes simply look here or there. The desire to swoop closer, to penetrate the distance between ourselves and the object of our desire, the rush of arousal that glides us through space in our imaginations until we're no longer gazing flatly from a distance, but intimately participating in the imaginary flesh of the other; this is where the zoom assumes a powerful symbolic or, if you like, pataphysical function; it is the fantasist's friend, and – pun intended – the voyeur's tool par excellence.

#### SHOOTING AT THE SPEED OF LIFE

*"Films are outmoded, don't you agree?  
They're shown three months after they're made."*

Jack Taylor in *Succubus*

Precise production dates for Franco's films after 1967 can be hard to trace, a problem compounded by the astonishing rate at which he worked and his habit of shooting scenes for more than one film

at a time. Quite often in the 1970s, Franco would begin a project with only a vague idea of what its final form was going to be. He would shoot for a while, sometimes funding from his own wallet, without having a deal in place that would guarantee a finished product. On other occasions, these speculative filming sessions were supported as it were parasitically, by a film Franco was already making. With the actors on set, and material for the contracted project completed, he would blithely suggest more scenes: the cast might find the new material puzzling, hard to contextualise in the film they were supposed to be making, but thanks to a combination of Franco's personal charm and some plausible excuses to take the edge off the scam, many just laughed and went along for the ride. Hastily strung together, these scenes would eventually make their way into a second film, the exact nature of which had yet to be decided. Franco swore blind that he never did this, but the testimony of numerous actors over the years suggests that he did. Jess Franco, it seems, was adept at squirrelling away footage that he could use for a later project – and not always to the financial advantage of the original producer.

This presents difficulties working out precisely when a film was made; the various shooting sessions for *Female Vampire*, for instance, are scattered across a whole year. It's interesting that this way of working was heavily concentrated in the mid-1970s; the opportunity seems to have arisen chiefly because Franco found himself with multiple deals available. Working in France for both Eurociné and Comptoir Français du Film Production, and with a number of Spanish co-production avenues still open, he could ease the financial burden of one project with money from another, perhaps allow a third speculative project to sprout in between, and then sell the results either way. Similar arrangements can be seen in the 1980s, although the deluge of unfinished projects around this time tells its own story; he couldn't always sell the results.

In the 1960s there are very few indications of this fast-and-loose approach to production. An extra scene for 1966's *Golden Horn*, featuring Howard Vernon, was grabbed in 1967 during the Lisbon shoot for *Succubus*, but that's about it. During the early days of Franco's tenure with Harry Alan Towers (1967-1969) there was an occasion, oft remarked upon, when one film (*The Girl from Rio*) finished shooting a week early, and rather than send the crew home Towers and Franco hastily wrote a new script over the weekend (*99 Women*), and began shooting it on the Monday. In this case the arrangement was made with the full collaboration of the producer. But did the experience suggest to Franco a possible way of working in the future? After all, *99 Women*, conceived in a rush and made without deliberation, went on to become one of Franco's biggest grossing films of all time, spending weeks in the upper reaches of the *Variety* chart. If one were to do something like it again, perhaps without the need to trouble the producer, all sorts of lucrative opportunities might present themselves...

Speculation of course. And yet no one has ever really adequately explained why Franco and Towers ceased working together.

Franco's claim that he left because creative pressure was being put on him by the American company A.I.P. doesn't really stack up: A.I.P. were nowhere near as instrumental in the Towers productions as Franco liked to pretend. Justifiably proud that a major American company wanted a few of his films, Franco was, however, guilty of exaggerating their involvement; out of nine Towers films only three were handled by A.I.P., and one of those (*Justine*) ended up unreleased in the USA. The real American connection was with Commonwealth United Entertainment Corporation, a company that flared brightly for two or three years and then crashed; Franco perhaps preferred to cite the robust A.I.P. as his American associates as they were better known. (See Julian Grainger's piece on Harry Alan Towers for more on this complex arrangement.) Within weeks of shooting *Count Dracula* (1969), Franco was supposed to move on to direct *Dorian Gray*. Instead, he parted company with Towers, quite abruptly, and *Dorian Gray* passed instead to Italian director Massimo Dallamano. Some have speculated that it was the overwhelmingly negative press response to *Count Dracula* that soured the Towers-Franco relationship, a supposition granted extra weight by a quote from Towers when interviewed by Allan Bryce in the 1980s: "Franco was a terribly nice man, but he shouldn't have been allowed to direct traffic. He was a jazz musician who played the trombone until he discovered the zoom lens." The frequency of reviewers' complaints about Franco's taste for the zoom seems to have affected Towers's feelings towards a director with whom he made some commercially successful films, but whether this occurred immediately after the drubbing that greeted *Count Dracula*, or years after, is unclear. Franco's painful experience directing *Count Dracula*, with money promised by Towers not materialising, may also have added to the discord.

What other influences were at work? Well, in an interview included on the *Castle of Fu Manchu* DVD, Towers recalled that after screening the somewhat haphazard finished film he turned to Franco and said, "You've done something that was impossible; you've successfully killed Fu Manchu!" Such a brutal joke can hardly have helped their relationship. Bearing in mind *The Castle of Fu Manchu* was ready for German release in April 1969, the screening to which Towers refers may have occurred as little as a month or so beforehand. If so, it means that Franco had already shot *Venus in Furs* and *Eugenie... the Story of Her Journey into Perversion* before Towers voiced his displeasure, which may shed light on an interesting development that took place in the summer of 1969, when Franco shot two films, on a tiny budget, that were not made for the Towers company. *Sex Charade* and *Nightmares Come at Night* were cheap even by Franco's standards, in fact in an interview given in 1976 he referred to the latter as the lowest budget in his career to that point.<sup>12</sup> The two films were made immediately before and after a major Towers production, *The Bloody Judge*; *Sex Charade* (now seemingly lost) even featured Maria Röhm, Towers's beautiful young wife and a star of most of his films. Did this cause even more friction between the two men?

Whatever the arrangements required to maintain his phenomenal output, there's no doubting Franco's energy. Having made five films in 1970 and six films in 1971, he sped up to eight in 1972 and an incredible eleven films in 1973 (plus three more that he was unable to complete). In the midst of this astonishing output, confusion bedevils the researcher; a lot of the films were made in France, and unlike the Spanish and German film industries the French are notably less passionate about record-keeping. And of course many of the films were produced for the erotic market where, for a variety of reasons, business practises were less inclined to visibility.<sup>13</sup> Franco worked for two significant French companies in the 1970s, Comptoir Français du Film Production and Eurociné, and neither were very keen to provide full or reliable screen credits. Nor, it seems, did they always file production information with the appropriate bodies. French visa numbers, when they do turn up on prints, don't really help much because they don't even indicate the year, and the point at which they're issued is vaguely defined at best. As Daniel Lesoeur explained to me: "A film is registered and gets a number when we deposit the agreement with the authors, and eventually the co-producer. Later on, the film is screened by a commission who decide if the film is good for all the public or if it's to be restricted. At this time the film gets the visa de contrôle which has the same number." Luckily, when speaking to Tim Greaves and Kevin Collins in 1996 Lina Romay was able to recall the sequence of the films in which she appeared,<sup>14</sup> but this invaluable interview still leaves a few mysteries, as she didn't appear on the scene until 1973. And to add to the fun, in a conversation between Jess and Lina preserved on the Blu-ray release of *The Hot Nights of Linda*, the two disagree protractedly about the order in which the films were made!

While the results of this fecundity are often astounding, no fan can avoid the uncomfortable realisation that while Franco lived to shoot, he was a lot less passionate about post-production. Many who admire his films are enormously fond of the roughness of technique, the sketchiness of structure and characterisation, the insane non-sequiturs and drastically rushed effects, but these self-same factors are why many other viewers find the films impossible to take seriously. In *A Virgin among the Living Dead* Franco plays an insane character who menaces the heroine with a severed chicken's head before dropping it in sudden boredom. I mention the scene (which was no doubt improvised on the spot) because it's a pretty good thumbnail sketch of Franco's working method, containing a truth about his character that I doubt he intended: as soon as an idea begins to bore him, he would rather drop it and wander off than persist with it, distracted by some other flight of fancy. Howard Vernon, Franco's close friend and trusted confidante, had serious reservations about this way of working, and he was brutally clear on the matter in an interview with the French magazine *Ciné-Girl* in 1977: "Franco I do not understand. It's like a woman who brings a child into the world and then, in the middle of the birth, she takes a knife and says 'I'm bored' - so she cuts out whatever comes first and then has half a baby. I do not want to speak ill of Franco, but I deeply regret





*shooting Eugenie... the Story of her Journey into Perversion (1969)...  
l to r: unknown; camera operator Javier Pérez Zofio; director of photography Manuel Merino; Jess Franco.*

this, because here is a guy who could have made extraordinary films.”<sup>15</sup> To extend Vernon’s metaphor, if films are like children, Franco was having kids by the dozen, then bundling the offspring out of the door with their clothes askew, trailing rips and tears and hasty patchings. Without sentiment he would return to his love affair with the camera and soon another scruffy urchin would emerge blinking onto the market. Every now and then a producer would march one of these itinerant bastards back to Franco and demand that it be remoulded, disciplined, or simply dressed up in different clothes to work the Red Light District ... Okay, as a metaphor it’s a little Dickensian and over-dramatic! It does, however, convey the devil-may-care attitude Franco took to certain aspects of his work in the 1970s. With the camera in his hand he was committed, excited, passionate, but once a rough cut had been stuck (one hesitates to say slapped) together, his interest in the subsequent finessing could be variable to say the least.

A 2010 interview with French film director and one-time sound editor Gérard Kikoïne throws considerable light on Franco’s working practises in the 1970s. Kikoïne had left his father’s business at Laboratoires CTM Gennevilliers in 1970 and set up his own editing and dubbing studio, taking with him some editing equipment and a library of sound effects and music which he’d built up throughout the 1960s. One day, Parisian film producer Robert de Nesle showed up asking for work to be done on a film he had with him. It was a work print, with no sound, in black and white and full of splices: de Nesle informed Kikoïne that it was directed by Jess Franco. He also handed him the screenplay, which Kikoïne remembers as, “A scenario of only four pages or so, not much dialogue. De Nesle said, ‘Don’t worry, you’re clever. You’ll sort it out.’ Which was great. That meant I had total freedom.”<sup>16</sup> The project was *The Demons*, Franco’s 1972 tale of witchcraft and witch-hunting, as it happened one of the more wordy and plot-heavy films of the period. Kikoïne hired someone to adapt the four-page ‘screenplay’ (essentially writing in the necessary dialogue), drafted a Foley artist, Henri Imbert, to handle the sound effects, and selected the soundtrack cues himself from his collection of library music LPs. Once the colour negative arrived it was edited using the work-print as template, and the music and dialogue were mixed and laid on. Robert de Nesle then came to view the finished result, with the film’s star Anne Libert on his arm. He loved what Kikoïne had done, and thus began a long and fruitful association, with Kikoïne handling nearly all of Franco’s films for de Nesle’s company, Comptoir Français du Film Production. So where was Franco in this arrangement? Kikoïne is clear: “I never met him. He made the films ... mostly they would arrive already cut. A black and white work copy. Probably he cut them in Spain. And then I had to reconstruct them with those four pages of script.”<sup>17</sup>

It’s probably just as well that this book does not lean any heavy auteurist theorising on the dialogue in these films, as it seems Franco was at best only partially responsible! What’s clear, though, is that the *mise-en-scène*, the editing rhythms, the creation of

space-time in the shots, these aspects are the work of Jess Franco. But the specific details of *dialogue* in these 1970s films are often the work of someone else. It’s hard to imagine a dedicated filmmaker being quite so cavalier about the words put into the mouths of their characters, but there it is. Franco, at least on the CFFP films, was so tightly focussed on gathering and editing the images that he was happy to leave the audio and dialogue to someone else. Thankfully, Franco got lucky; Gérard Kikoïne’s ear for great music and unusual juxtapositions brings out the best in the material. The wrong music cues would have resulted in wholesale sabotage of that most vital component, mood, so we must give full credit to Kikoïne for achieving a sensitive, creative and fully realised audio track in perfect sympathy with the images.

While it’s probably true, as Howard Vernon suggests, that Franco could have created masterpieces were it not for his tendency to start a new project before the emulsion was dry on yesterday’s rushes, such restraint was evidently not in his temperament. Creative achievement of any sort can only come from inner compulsion – from desire. Franco followed where his desires led him, and his idiosyncratic career is shaped by an absolute commitment to the siren call of his particular muse. If he’d worked differently, who knows how many of his best films might never have happened? Ultimately, second-guessing alternative timelines is pointless; Franco did what he did, the way that he wanted, and for that we should be grateful.

## FRANCO IN THE UK

In Seventies Great Britain, while the sexual revolution was sweeping through youth culture, the intelligentsia, and various exotic social groupings, it was yet to loosen the Establishment’s grip on popular entertainment. Sex films at the time were splicy, frustrating affairs with the ‘meat’ of the matter forever nipped in the bud. Throughout the decade, Franco’s films steered ever closer to pornography, which meant frequent ‘censor resistance’ in the UK. *Justine* and *Succubus* were initially rejected in the 1960s, before being granted cut releases in 1971 and 1973 respectively. *Le journal intime d’une nymphomane* opened in sex cinemas as *Diary of a Nymphomaniac* in January 1974, minus its salacious pussy-shots, and *Maciste contre la reine des Amazones* gained a splicy X-cert release as *The Lustful Amazon* in February 1974. However, the BBFC were growing increasingly fed up with Jess Franco: having balked at his sadistic witch-hunting tale *The Demons* in March 1973, they saw red when his gleefully Sadean *Plaisir à trois* (aka *How to Seduce a Virgin*) popped up in May 1974, and rejected it outright.

Attempting to release the film were Cinecenta, a theatre chain specializing in erotica from America and the Continent. Many of their acquisitions were either banned or suffered swingeing cuts at the hands of the censor before being grudgingly allowed an ‘X’ certificate, in versions that often dipped below sixty minutes. However, Cinecenta (and companies like them) were unwilling

to admit defeat. One further legal avenue was open: if a film had been banned by the BBFC it was still possible to ask for a 'local X' from individual councils. Thus, *Plaisir à trois* was submitted to London's then governing body, the Greater London Council (GLC) for consideration in 1975. They had already succeeded in this endeavour with another Jess Franco film, *The Demons*, which was rejected by the BBFC outright on the 23rd of March 1972 but which entered selective distribution to the country's sex cinemas in 1973, following successful applications for local licences in a slew of British cities such as Liverpool, Sheffield, Newcastle and Birmingham. Emboldened by their achievement, Cinecenta took up the cudgels again and *How To Seduce a Virgin* was granted a number of local certificates. It eventually toured the country's sex cinemas in the summer of 1975. Success, however, did not come without a fight; in a move that may strike modern viewers as hilarious, Franco's film became, albeit briefly, the focus of a national campaign against 'smut' in the cinema, mobilised by members of the House of Lords and Britain's foremost 'moral campaigner' Mary Whitehouse. Quentin Falk, in the long-defunct British film trade magazine *Cinema & TV Today* (dated 26 April 1975), outlined the controversy stirred up by Franco's film under the headline "GLC ignores anti-porn protestors": "*The GLC refused to be seduced this week by the members of the Festival of Light and the Salvation Army. For despite the extra-mural influence of some 100 anti-porn campaigners, including Lord Longford, who went down on their knees as the council met, the GLC endorsed its viewing board's decision to give a certificate to "How To Seduce a Virgin."* The French sex film, which has been variously described as a "tale of murder and sex in a mental hospital" and telling "how a husband procures a woman for his lesbian wife to seduce and murder" was refused a certificate by the British Board of Film Censors. The film was eventually passed by 44 votes to 36, much to the chagrin of the praying campaigners. Cinecenta, who are handling the film, originally sought a GLC certificate in January and then withdrew the film when the big censorship debate came up in council at the end of that month. After the GLC voted to retain censorship for adults, Cinecenta then offered the film again for consideration. Commented viewing board chairman, Phil Bassett: 'It's a rather sordid, seedy film.'"<sup>18</sup>

Though it eventually eluded the outraged holy rollers, *How to Seduce a Virgin* hardly set the box office alight, nor, as far as I can tell, did it spend a huge amount of time on the sex cinema circuit. What's interesting today is to see such a furore surrounding a relatively obscure title, with Christians praying and Lords-a-leaping to kick Franco's film into the gutter. Sadly, no British video company picked the film up for distribution in the heyday of the 'video-nasty' so we have no way of knowing how it would have fared in that feverish moral climate. It's unlikely that it would have been so controversial when films such as *Cannibal Holocaust* and *I Spit On Your Grave* were in circulation, but you never know - after all, Franco was actively loathed within the BBFC. Following the *Plaisir à trois* fiasco, a few more of his films trickled through the

country's dirty-mac salons: *Female Vampire* played in an abysmally truncated 58-minute version as *The Bare Breasted Countess* in December 1975; *Célestine, Maid at Your Service* underwent cuts for fellatio, woman-on-top sex and dirty dialogue in October 1974; *Barbed Wire Dolls* came out as *Caged Women* in 1977, losing sixteen minutes in the process; *Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun* was banned outright in February 1979; *Satanic Sisters* lost ten minutes and became the confusingly titled *Swedish Nympho Slaves* in 1980; *Bloody Moon* rode the slasher bandwagon in 1982 (cut by a couple of minutes); *Sadomania*, retitled *Prisoners of the Flesh*, unsurprisingly lost seventeen minutes of cruelty, rape and simulated bestiality in March 1982; and finally *La chica de las bragas transparentes*, submitted as *Pick Up Girls*, lost four minutes of pussy close-ups in March 1983 to become the last Franco film to play the British cinema circuit.

#### FRANCO AND THE SPANISH HORROR BOOM

By 1974 Franco was veering away from Spanish production. *Night of the Skull* was his last Spanish-produced film for five years; the 27 films he made between 1974 and 1978 involved no Spanish money at all. Instead Franco turned to producers in France, Germany and Switzerland who could offer him the freedom he desired to make a new kind of picture, partially indebted to horror, but electrified too with a dark eroticism that occasionally crossed the line into pornography.

Although Franco's erotic interests could not be accommodated in his native land, Spanish horror was in rude health in the 1970s. The country had carved a robust niche for itself thanks to a snowballing production rate and a host of horror pictures ranging from the inspired to the formulaic to the downright crazy. Building upon Franco's success in the 1960s, a host of other horror specialists began to steer the genre into bloodier waters. Central to this process was Jacinto Molina aka Paul Naschy, an ex-weightlifter who turned to acting in the early 1960s. His stocky physique and athletic ability helped him to secure roles in action adventures, historical epics and peplums, but Naschy's greatest love was horror, in particular the American horror films of the 1930s and 1940s. It was affection for the sort of films championed by magazines like *Famous Monsters of Filmland* that inspired him to write a script about his favourite denizen of the dark, the Wolfman. The result was *La marca del hombre lobo*, first shown in Spain in July of 1968. This tale of vampires seeking to gain control of the Wolfman for their own nefarious ends was helmed by Enrique López Eguiluz, who'd already directed Naschy the same year in an extremely rare Spanish giallo, *Agonizando en el crimen*. Naschy had written the starring role of wolfman Waldemar Daninsky for Lon Chaney Jr. but when the Hollywood veteran turned it down Naschy stepped in, and a horror star was born. *La marca del hombre lobo* hit Spanish cinemas in 70mm and glorious 3D (something of a holy grail for aficionados, as no surviving 3D print has yet been



found) and enjoyed immediate commercial success, with almost 900,000 viewers on its first release (twice as many as Franco's *Miss Muerte* two years earlier). In 2D form, the film was released in the USA in 1971, and played for years at innumerable drive-ins as *Frankenstein's Bloody Terror* (a ludicrously random title apparently thrust upon the film to satisfy an earlier promise of a Frankenstein film to the US distributor). Such was the vigour and explicit horror of the film that nearly all of Naschy's subsequent Wolfman outings performed internationally. Next came *Los monstruos del terror* (1970), confusingly marketed as *Dracula vs. Frankenstein*, one of three films with this title released within two years (*Dracula vs. Frankenstein* by Al Adamson came out in 1971, Franco's *Dracula contra Frankenstein* was released in '72). By 1974 Naschy had clocked up six Wolfman pics, the others being *Werewolf Shadow* (1971), *The Fury of the Wolfman* (1972), *Dr. Jekyll y el Hombre Lobo* (1972) and *Curse of the Devil* (1974). Interpolated between them, he wrote and starred in a modern-day murder thriller (*7 Murders for Scotland Yard*, 1971), a hunchback horror film (*Hunchback of the Morgue*, 1972), a mummy movie (*The Mummy's Revenge*, 1973), a black magic possession story (*Horror Rises from the Tomb*, 1973), a zombie movie (*Vengeance of the Zombies*, 1973), a serial killer drama (*Los crímenes de Petiot*, 1973), a couple of violent gialli (*A Dragonfly for Each Corpse*, 1973, and *The Blue Eyes of the Broken Doll*, 1974), a historical tale of devil worship (*The Devil's Possessed*, 1974) and an addition to the pantheon of Dracula films (*Count Dracula's Great Love*, 1973).

The Naschy films featured directors from a talent pool that included León Klimovsky, Javier Aguirre, José Luis Madrid, Carlos Aured and José María Zabalza. All were relatively young men, in their thirties at the time, with the exception of the veteran Klimovsky, born in 1906. However, Naschy's controlling hand as both writer and star ensured that, despite the variations between directors, the films feel very much of a piece. Naschy's 'house style', his earnest, doggedly literal exploration of horror themes, was an immovable constant, as impervious to irony as Jess Franco was alert to it. But whatever one may think of the Naschy films, they came from a place of love and conviction; he lacked the experimental inclinations and sardonic sensibility of Jess Franco, but his signature creation Waldemar Daninsky is so poignantly straight-arrow that many have fallen in love with him. Naschy's determination to play onscreen all the key movie monsters is the ambition of a ten year old sustained with admirable fortitude through an entire adult career - and who but the most cynical could fault him for that? Occasionally, the films achieve a sort of delirium arising from the haphazard way old horror tropes are thrown together, something they share with Jess Franco's *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein* and *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein*. But while Franco's film universe feels purposely avant-garde and disorientating, Naschy is always striving for a steadfast coherence he can't quite pull off. This leads to a kitsch dimension, towards the danger of laughing at Naschy rather than with him. It's only his passion for horror that saves

his work from this ignoble fate; after a while you develop genuine respect for his commitment. Giggling about him being too tubby to play Dracula (in *Count Dracula's Great Love*), we're always on the brink of turning him into a Spanish Edward D. Wood, which is ultimately unfair; the films are mostly well directed and attractively photographed, and their inherent absurdities don't ruin their simple, spooky pleasures.

Naschy aside, the most prolific and influential Spanish horror specialist (and the only one Jess Franco admired<sup>19</sup>) was Amando de Ossorio, who in the course of a chequered career achieved lasting greatness with a menace as iconic as anything in European horror. Beginning with *La noche del terror ciego* ('The Night of Blind Terror') aka *Tombs of the Blind Dead*, shot in September of 1971 and released to Madrid cinemas in April 1972, Ossorio directed a series of four films featuring infamous medieval sect the Knights Templars, risen from the dead as wizened eyeless zombies. Sentenced to death for heresy, then blinded by birds who pecked out their eyes, these hideous creatures are as close as anyone in the cinema has ever come to the withered ghouls prowling the inky shadows of the 1950s horror comics. They were created quite literally by Ossorio's own hands; he designed and sculpted the creatures himself. Such was the positive commercial and critical response to the first film that three more swiftly followed; *The Return of the Evil Dead* (premiered in Barcelona, October 1973), *The Ghost Galleon* (made in 1973 but unreleased until September 1975) and *The Night of the Sea Gulls* (premiered in Barcelona, August 1975). Although none of the 'sequels' quite matched the first, either aesthetically or commercially, the second and fourth films are moody and enjoyable. Only the third, the tedious *Ghost Galleon*, lets the side down. Ossorio interspersed them with a handful of other horror projects, none of which really caught the audience's imagination as much as the Blind Dead movies. However, some are worth a look; *Malenka, The Niece of the Vampire* (1969) is the weakest despite some lovely sub-Bava photography; the gory *The Lorelei's Grasp* (1973) is a fun monster movie with a twist of the Nibelungen legend; *The Night of the Sorcerers* (1973) is a kitschy witch tale that's silly enough to amuse; *The Possessed* (1975) is a post-*Exorcist* knees-up; and *The Sea Serpent* (1985) pulls out of mothballs the 1950s notion of a sea monster created by radioactivity as a welcome mat for its ailing Hollywood star Ray Milland.

Among the other Spanish directors to visit the horror genre in the early 1970s, Eloy de la Iglesia is the most accomplished and serious-minded, although his involvement in the genre grew steadily less frequent. Arriving on the Spanish film scene in the mid-1960s, Iglesia secured a soundtrack by Daniel White and Jess Franco for his third film, a downbeat exposé of sporting corruption called *Cuadrilátero* ('Boxing Ring', 1970 - the music borrows from *The Castle of Fu Manchu* and features a title theme that Franco would recycle for 1983's *Revenge in the House of Usher*). Iglesia's first genre film was *The Glass Ceiling* (1971), an intelligent slow-burn thriller that just about counts as a Spanish giallo, though it's

at the talky and psychological end of the spectrum compared to the more shocking versions coming out of Italy. Sensationalism is much more apparent in the excellent horror film *The Cannibal Man* (1972), in which a poor, debt-ridden slaughterhouse worker is driven to commit an escalating series of murders due to various misfortunes and bad decisions. Emerging from the film is a strand of political consciousness, with the inequities of capitalism very much in the dock, and a concern with issues of gay representation, something that flourished in the director's later non-genre offerings. Also in 1972, Iglesia directed an excellent (though little-seen) twist-in-the-tale murder mystery called *Nadie oyó gritar* ('No One Heard Her Scream'), a taut and teasing cat-and-mouse story that deserves a wider audience.

Another major player active at the time was Jorge Grau, whose landmark zombie opus *The Living Dead at Manchester Morgue* (1974) is one of the most atmospheric and thoroughly engaging horror films of all time. He also directed *The Female Butcher* (1973), an adaptation of the Countess Bathory legend, and *Violent Bloodbath* (1973), a psychological horror thriller starring Fernando Rey as a judge who goes on vacation only to find that murders happening around him mirror the cases he's recently pronounced upon. Also of note is Narciso Ibáñez Serrador, whose creepy thriller *The House That Screamed* (1969) and Hitchcockian horror story *Would You Kill a Child?* (1975) are tightly controlled, well-written tales with a firm grasp of suspense. Serrador also has a knack with actors, drawing taut, plausible performances from minor British stars like John Moulder-Brown and Prunella Ransome. His migration into Spanish TV, principally light entertainment shows, can seem a serious loss to the genre, although a recent made-for-TV horror story *La culpa*, with its sluggishly paced narrative, slyly negative portrayal of lesbianism and Catholic stance against abortion, suggests otherwise. And let's not forget José María Elorrieta, who after a career in adventures and westerns made three lovably hokey horror films before his death in 1974; *The Feast of Satan* (1971), a pacy black magic tale shot at the Orloff/Fisherman castle; *El espectro del terror* (1972), a psycho-thriller with a convincingly deranged performance by Aramis Ney as a psychotic drug addict; and *The Curse of the Vampire* (1972), a routine bloodsucking tale enlivened by some Francoesque lesbian frolics and another creepy performance by Ney, this time using the forename Nicholas.

Then there are the stragglers and one-offs. Francisco Lara Polop (Franco's assistant director on *Kiss Me Monster* and *Sadisterotica*) showed immense promise with his creepy, fog-shrouded 1972 debut *Murder Mansion* but wandered off into mainstream romances such as 1973's *Cebo para una adolescente* with a teenage Ornella Muti. José Luis Merino's *The Killers of the Castle of Blood* (1970), a bizarre creepy-castle extravaganza, and *The Return of the Zombis* [sic] (1973), a daft but spirited Gothic creaker with necrophilia, black magic and zombies, can warm a Euro-horror fan's heart on a stormy night. Paella-Western specialist Alfonso Balcázar, one of the family of Balcázars who owned the main studio facility in

Barcelona, had a stab at a giallo, with the not-as-exciting-as-it-sounds *La casa de las muertas vivientes* (1971). Journeyman director Pedro Luis Ramírez retired from the industry with *School of Death* (1975), a Gothic chiller set in a girl's boarding school, featuring a concentrate of *The Awful Dr. Orloff*; a villainous surgeon seeking to repair his own ravaged face. Documentary and TV filmmaker Jesús García de Dueñas made his only feature film *El asesino no está solo* (1975), a brooding giallo starring David Carpenter and Maria Röhm, about a handsome young man whose childhood trauma at the hands of his flirtatious sister feeds his adult penchant for garrotting hookers with cheesewire. And bringing up the rear is the daft and dopey but nevertheless endearing *The Devil's Kiss* (1973) aka *The Wicked Caress of Satan*, a mash-up of mad scientists, devil-worshippers, perverted dwarves, sexy models, psychic powers, grave-robbing and séances begun by Jordi Gigó but completed by Gigó's more experienced assistant José Ulloa.

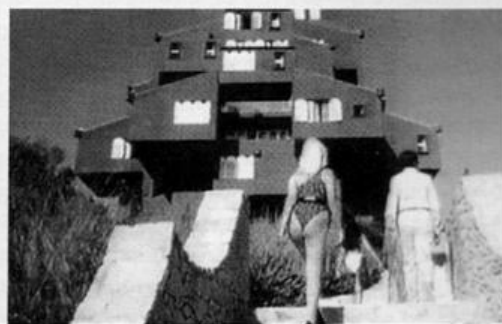
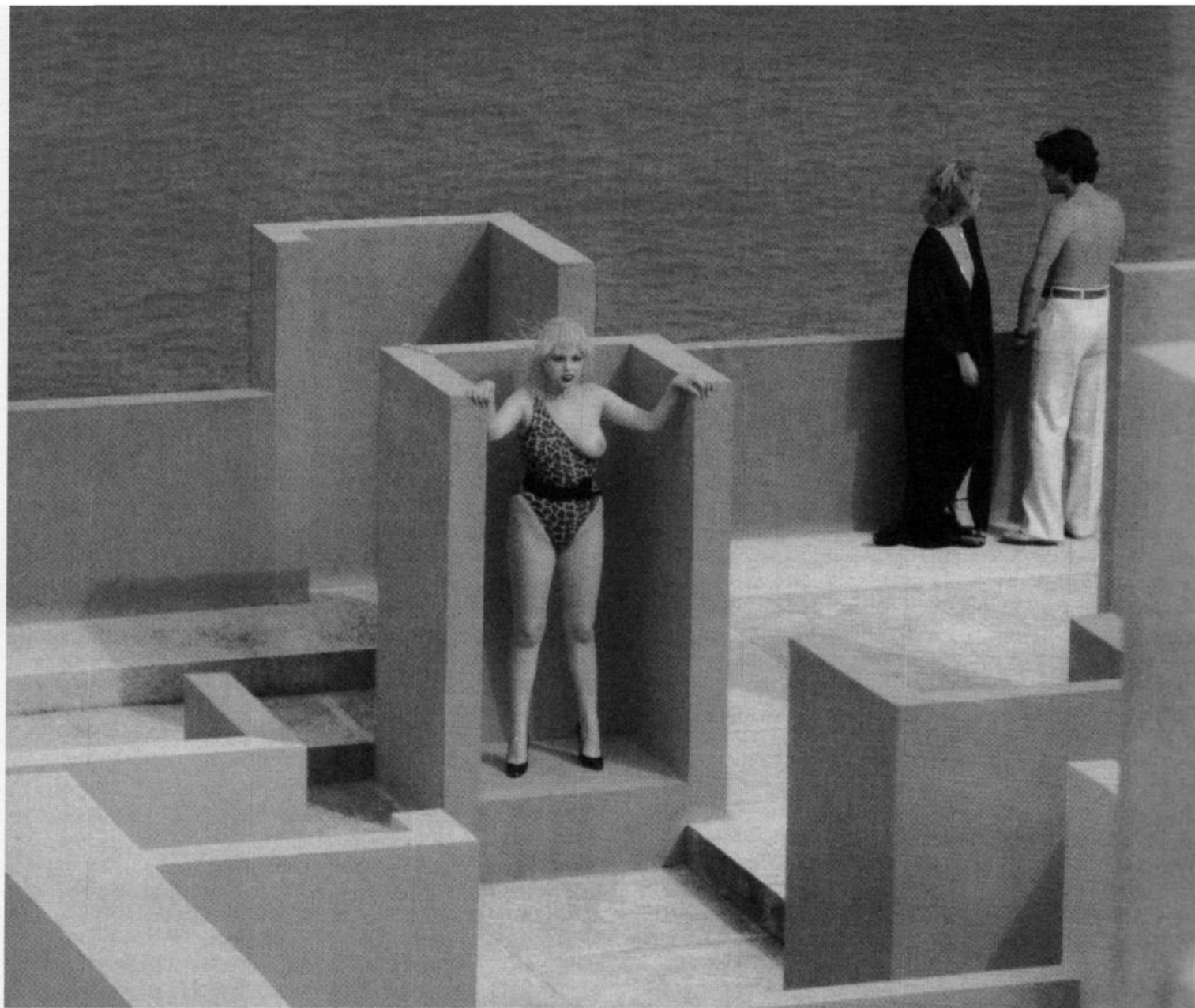
What many of these films share is a lingering attachment to the Gothic strain of horror that swept through Britain and Italy in the 1960s. The Hammer films, and Italian artists Mario Bava, Riccardo Freda and Antonio Margheriti, cast long shadows over Spain's horror output in the 1970s, and thanks to Paul Naschy the 1930s Universal horrors were kept on life support too, long after they'd ceased to be an influence elsewhere. Whether this resulted in charming incongruity or the tedious repetition of old ideas is ultimately a matter of taste, but there's no doubt that as the 1970s progressed, Jess Franco was cutting an avant-garde path that bore little relation to the prevailing trends at home. Although his last Spanish film for five years, 1973's *Night of the Skull*, was exactly the kind of film his countrymen were making, we need only look at the two thoroughly modern (though misleadingly titled) horror films Franco made in 1974 – *Lorna... the Exorcist* and *Exorcism* – to see just how drastically at odds with Spanish trends he'd become.

## THEMES, ECHOES, CONNECTIONS

"When Marco Ferreri worked in Spain [...] I remember once when he was preparing a film, during a meeting of intellectual filmmakers like Saura, Mario Camus and the others, he and I were chatting outside when the door of the conference room opened and the filmmakers came out. Ferreri rushed over and said: 'As you come out, leave your 'messages' on this chair. Then he said to Saura: 'Hey, I'm beginning a shoot next Monday... and I haven't got a 'message'. You don't happen to have a little itty-bitty message ... a message you're not going to use or that you don't need any more?'"

Jess Franco, interviewed in 1986<sup>20</sup>

Franco's talent sprawls; it wanders and digresses. It does not deliver itself in one easy package. Some films are intensely loaded with his signature qualities, others possess only a trickle. Even so, once you've tuned in, turned on, caught the flavour, a single scene in an otherwise lesser film may release the heady vapour you're



top: "La Muralla Rojo", part of Riccardo Bofill's "La Manzanera" housing complex in Calpe (Spain), as seen here in *Eugenie (historia de una perversion)* (1980).  
bottom: Standing directly alongside "La Muralla Rojo" is "Xanadu", seen here in *She Killed in Ecstasy* (1970), *Countess Perverse* (1973) and *Eugenie (historia de una perversion)*.



looking for. You need the patience and persistence (and naturally, the inclination) to sample at least ten Franco films to really home in on the signal, to develop your palate for the rest (and yes, I will mix metaphors shamelessly throughout this book, so watch out). Certain features are so hard to deal with on early acquaintance that you'd swear he was trying to get rid of you. Consider camera focus for instance, one of the foregone conclusions of normal moviemaking. In some cases scenes slip out of focus due to error, in other cases he does it on purpose. It is very hard to tell the difference at first. It's even harder to distinguish between technical errors left in the film because they have some appeal (spontaneity, wit, provocation), and errors more likely due to boredom and lack of commitment. The trouble is, you probably need at least ten Franco films under your belt to begin to even care!

The subtle gradations of his style occur across a broad spectrum, with anarchic inspiration at one extreme and short-tempered carelessness at the other. Watching just a single film gives a burst of raw signal that can seem like pure noise, but see enough of them and the oscillation builds and builds, until a unique psychosonority can be heard. It's a process that's aided by the repetition which is endemic to his cinema; stories retold, actors recast, locations revisited, each iteration helping to build up that sonority until you hear it loud and clear.

When a filmmaker is as prolific as Jess Franco, it's natural for the viewer to seek patterns. While total thematic unity is asking too much, dedicated fans nevertheless begin to wonder if his byzantine career might link together to form some kind of general artistic project or trajectory. Certainly the teasing presence of thematic and talismanic links and echoes encourages such a thought: Franco compulsively re-used character names, he cast the same actors over and over again, he revisited story ideas and key locations umpteen times. After a while, for the regular viewer, the boundaries and differences begin to dissolve in the mind, and the terrain transforms into a sensuous country of the imagination, beyond the city limits of individual films.

It's easy to be swamped by the mass of overlapping information. Take the use of recurring names and characters (Doctor Orloff; Al Pereira; the Red Lips girls; Irina; Linda; Lorna; Eugenie; Radeck). When the character seems the same, reading connections is a normal response: it's obviously worth looking at the various manifestations of 'Doctor Orloff' from his debut in *Gritos en la noche* to his swansong in *Faceless*. Although Orloff is never explicitly portrayed as the same man twice (though originally Howard Vernon he's played by different actors in *Dr. Orloff's Monster* and *The Sinister Eyes of Dr. Orloff*, for instance) there remains the suggestion of family lineage, revealed through convergence of character traits (always and again with the dodgy medical ethics and pretty girls!). But what happens when 'Irina', played by the same actress, Lina Romain, appears as a bloodsucking immortal in *Female Vampire* (1973), a bubble-headed stripper in *Mansion of the Living Dead* (1982), a showbiz psychic in *Mil sexos tiene la noche* (1983), and a

sadistic slave trader in *Lilian (la virgen pervertida)* (1983)? Is Franco establishing thematic unity by giving these later characters a name from an earlier film? No, he's simply having fun populating the massive, sprawling canvas of his cinema with familiar triggers and echoes of earlier works. There's no 'master-narrative' but if you want to play along that's fine; Jess Franco revelled in creating a dizzy sense of time and space overlaid, echoing with characters and archetypes swimming in and out of focus – in one film centre-stage, in another, flung into the outer darkness for a mere walk-on. It's as if they're trapped on some karmic wheel, round and round, again and again, now rich, now poor, now master, now servant, flooded with energy or lost and listless. The effect is amplified by Franco's practise of using a regular repertory cast, drawing on actors who appear in dense clusters of his work, with some performers (such as Antonio Mayans, Howard Vernon or Lina Romain) so frequently cast that the reverberations are astonishing.

In Franco's universe, stories criss-cross one another, and we glimpse the same landmarks from many different angles. This is true of both the physical and psychological geography of his cinema. The same walls and fountains and frescos that appear in *Virgin among the Living Dead* (1971) and *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein* (1972) turn up again, four years later, in *Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun* (1976). Soledad Miranda's tragic Mrs. Johnson drives into the ocean at the end of *She Killed in Ecstasy* (1970); three years later in *Countess Perverse* her house by the sea, an astonishing cubist pyrite perched on a cliff-top, belongs to the Zaroffs, two sadistic aristocrats with a penchant for hunting humans. In 1980's *Eugénie, historia de una perversión* this same house will have been converted into flats within which a brother and sister enjoy incestuous sex while tormenting their deranged female slave, who incidentally looks a lot like one of the Zaroffs' victims... Franco's cinema is one of palimpsest, superimposition, multiple stories occupying the same co-ordinate points. Faces, places, costumes, props, storylines appear and reappear. Ghosts of previous characters haunt the actors as they play out their parts within these same walls, these same gardens, these same avenues, like the guests in *Last Year at Marienbad*, returning as they did the year before and the year before that, in different roles, different costumes, different versions. And joining in the echoes and reiterations, appearing alongside the cast and puckishly tempting our scrutiny, is Franco himself, one of his own most regular cast members, joining the dance from foreground devil (*Exorcism*) to background fool (*Kiss Me Killer*) and back again.

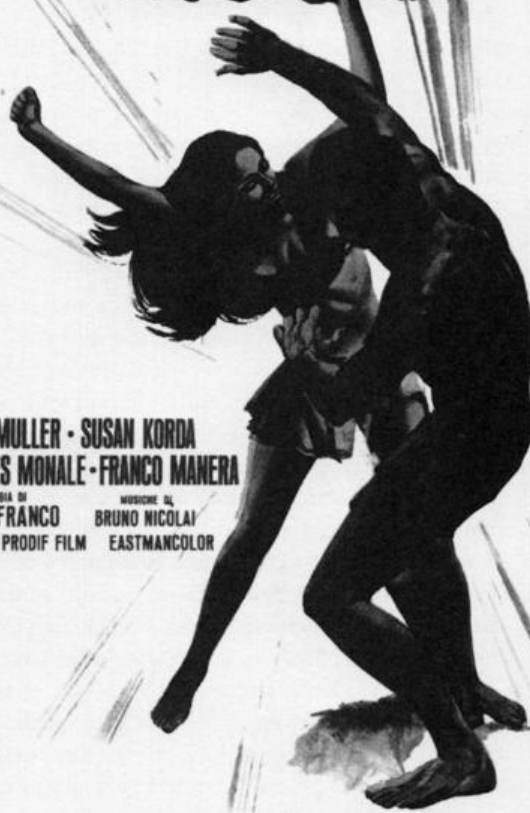
Noting as many of these connections as possible, collating the in-jokes that run rampant through Franco's scripts, mapping the recurrences and echoes and variations, is a pleasurable part of the Franco experience. But Franco was not making a mural, or if he was it's an abstract. When we step back to see the whole thing, his cinema does not click into place like some sprawlingly complex but ultimately finishable puzzle, the last piece of which depends upon the viewer catching up with, say, the currently lost 1969 film *Sex*

Klaus Kinski als Marquis de Sade  
 Romina Power · Maria Rohm · Horst Frank  
 Sylva Koscina · Jack Palance  
 Rosalba Neri · Rosemary Dexter · Akim Tamiroff  
 Mercedes McCambridge und Harald Leipnitz



# DE SADE 2000

PAUL MULLER · SUSAN KORDA  
 ANDRES MONALE · FRANCO MANERA  
 REGIA DI JESS FRANCO  
 MUSICA DI BRUNO NICOLAI  
 PRODUZIONE PRODIG FILM EASTMANCOLOR



*Eugénie*  
 Historia de una perversión  
 del MARQUES DE SADE  
 Escrita y dirigida por  
**JESS FRANCO**

CLASIFICADA "S"

Marquis de Sade's  
*"Justine"*



based on a novel by  
 the Marquis de Sade

Un film basado en textos del  
 Marqués de Sade

*Charade*. There is no coherent under-text waiting to emerge, *Name of the Rose* style, from the lost chapters of Franco's holy writ. How tempting it is to seek meaning behind all of these connections, as if we may therefore discern the master-narrative of Franco's cinema! The 'key' to Jess Franco is not hidden in the 'depth' of his films; there really is precious little 'depth'. The 'messages' that Franco was so dismissive about in the quote above are conspicuous by their absence. I have some things to say about one of Franco's most recurrent artistic signatures, his handling of time, later in this chapter, but what 'matters' in his work is not some jewel of significance tucked away in the subtext, to be snuffled out of the loam by persistent digging. It's something far more wide-reaching, something of true practical import to anyone coming into contact with his work, and it's printed into each and every decision Franco ever made, whether in positive or negative. This ever-present leitmotif of Franco, both onscreen and in his life, can be encapsulated in one word: freedom.

Franco was a man who sought ever greater freedom to create as he wished, but he didn't work in a void. He was a joyful convergence of influences, and he expressed many a passion for the work of others. It's worth taking a look at two of these passionate 'hot spots', strange attractors that pull the contours of his cinema into energy coils. So let's begin with the figure who without a doubt plays the most significant role in Franco's artistic discourse, a man whose name sets off so many flashing lights, so many alarm bells, triggers so many sensual lures that he really *has* to be our first port of call...

#### THE MARQUIS DE SADE

Over the years, Franco turned out tangential adaptations of works by writers like Edgar Wallace, Sax Rohmer, Jules Verne, Octave Mirbeau and Edgar Allan Poe, but the literary source for whom he demonstrated the fiercest passion was that sainted monster of 18th Century literature, The Marquis de Sade. His passion for Sade, the black sheep of French arts and letters, is a pervasive presence in his cinema, and the films in which he adapts the Marquis are often his best.

Franco's first attempt to mount a Sade adaptation was a Harry Alan Towers production, *Marquis de Sade's "Justine"* (1968), a bawdy romp enlivened by a few mad interjections from a cast including Mercedes McCambridge and Jack Palance. It was followed a year later by the immeasurably more successful *Eugenie... the Story of Her Journey into Perversion* (1969). However, both films boasted scripts by Towers working under his regular pen name 'Peter Welbeck' and should therefore be regarded as collaborations. When the two men parted company in 1970 Franco swiftly revisited De Sade, this time with an extremely low budget film called simply *Eugenie* (1970). This essential Franco cornerstone is one of his cheapest films but it's imbued with all that's strange and erotic and powerful in his work. Along with three subsequent Sade adaptations, *How*

*to Seduce a Virgin* (1973), *Eugenie, historia de una perversion* (1980) and *Gemidos de placer* (1982), it embodies the libertarian spirit if not the precise letter of the source material. Not all of Franco's adaptations are successful: an attempt to spin a Sadean storyline into the hardcore *Cocktail spécial* (1978), for instance, proved dreary and unedifying. However, the best of these films achieve their aim not through strict fidelity to the source material but by use of a mesmeric minimalism, providing a compelling visual analogue for the obsessiveness of Sade's writing.

But if the amoral sensualism of Sade provides Franco with his holy text, one has to say he occasionally blasphemes spectacularly. An entirely un-Sadean compassion for put-upon victims intrudes at odd intervals, and cannot be explained away as irony. (Sade would often express 'sympathy' for his unfortunate heroines, but the glint in his eye through his crocodile tears was clear.) Maurice Blanchot, in his elegant and lucid essay on Sade,<sup>21</sup> drew attention to a philosophical abyss in Sade's work; between his amoral espousal of selfish pleasure as the only source of meaning in life, and his despal of authority, corruption and exploitation of power by the vested interests of Church, State and judiciary. Surely, one could argue, a Sadean should applaud these monsters of authority, who so successfully exploit their privileged positions to get precisely what they want from life and fuck everyone else? The more one leans towards one end of the dichotomy in Sade, the more glaringly the other end rises up, like a seesaw with warring rhetoricians on either end. Franco too finds himself on this seesaw, sometimes expressing moral outrage at abusive authority, other times indulging sadistic relish while depicting the suffering of bruised and uncomprehending innocents. In his 'Women-in-Prison' films this dichotomy defines their very existence; films like *99 Women* (1968) or *Barbed Wire Dolls* (1975) simultaneously revel in the erotically exciting suffering of victims whilst painting sadistic warders and governors as enemies of freedom. At times Franco's moralist stance is devoid of internal contradictions. In *Sinner: The Secret Diary of a Nymphomaniac* (1972) we see him in uncommonly angry mood about the bourgeoisie's contempt for women who work as prostitutes. One recalls the way the 'Yorkshire Ripper' investigation only became a national cause for concern when killer Peter Sutcliffe changed his modus operandi and began murdering women who were *not* prostitutes but 'respectable' members of the public. As recently as 2007, the murder of several women in Ipswich was reported on the BBC news with lines like 'Another prostitute has been murdered' rather than 'Another woman has been murdered'. The fact that the profession is considered more important than anything else about the victims suggests a persistent underlying contempt for those working in the sex trade, and this theme is explored by Franco in *Sinner* with undisguised loathing for the authorities and for bourgeois judgementalism. It's certainly a far cry from the entirely immoral sequence in *99 Women* (1968), in which a lesbian rape culminates with the victim 'liking it' to the accompaniment of leeringly sexy music.



Franco would explore Sadean themes with a variety of emphases, ranging from salacious relish to melancholy pessimism. He never tired of the subject matter, but he never resolved the contradictions either, which, considering his attraction elsewhere to pleasures deferred and desires unattainable, may have been the appeal all along...

#### JEAN-LUC GODARD, ALLUSIONS AND ILLUSIONS

Alex Mendibil: *Were you fond of Godard's Alphaville?*

Franco: *Of course! Godard's my favorite director ever. I've no problem admitting this. At least, not any more.*

Mendibil: *And do you like everything he's made so far? He has changed a lot since then.*

Franco: *That's one of the reasons I like him so much. I like open-minded, innovative people. His Histoire(s) du Cinema are fucking great, the Holy Bible of cinema.*

As long ago as 1965's *Attack of the Robots*, Franco was telling the world of his love for France's most obdurate and challenging director, Jean-Luc Godard (it is Franco's voice that we hear over a bus station tannoy, drumming up business for *Alphaville*, "*le grand film de Jean-Luc Godard avec Eddie Constantine et Anna Karina!*"). A year later, two characters in *Succubus* discuss how outmoded everything is (modishness being very à la mode for movies to discuss at the time). One of them, a woman, says: "*Buñuel, Fritz Lang, Godard – they're not outmoded. Every time I see their films they seem new to me... they've got something...*" The register of her delivery, the sense of conversational rhythm in the language rather than the stiffness of 'dialogue', makes the statement sound authentic and heartfelt. One feels she is speaking for the director. In Buñuel, of course, Franco recognised a fellow provocateur and a challenger of religious cant and hypocrisy, especially in the realm of desire. In Lang he was excited by Expressionist visual style, and the love of pulp storytelling taken that extra step forward into the baroque. But Godard? The matter is not quite so straightforward. Franco's overt Godardian influences – parodic distanciation, impatience with the fourth wall – turn up in a handful of films like *Les Grandes Emmerdeuses* (1974), *Midnight Party* (1975) and the delirious *El sexo está loco* (1981), but it would be wrong to make too much of his tendency to have characters address the camera, or his use of stylistic stereotypes; and there certainly isn't what you'd call a rigorous deconstruction of the spectator's relationship with the image. As for politics à la Godard, forget it. There is, however, common ground to be noted elsewhere, as we shall see in a moment.

The reference to Godard in *Succubus* is merely one such 'nod' in a film packed with allusions to other artists; Buñuel, Lang, Sade, Goethe, Heine, Faulkner, Camus ... the list is so long it becomes a joke. The question is whether Franco is being sincere, or sending up serious art's tendency to scaffold itself with references to other

great works. (Godard of course is notoriously compulsive in this respect, scattering his scripts and mise-en-scène with allusions to painting, literature and other filmmakers.) It's a vexed question, and an area into which critics stumble at their peril. Franco was extremely well-read, with a voracious knowledge of cinema: he was never out-and-out pretentious. A teaser, a builder of myths, a brazen liar when it suited him, but never pretentious. As an interviewee he was often a prankster. Present him, earnestly, with a list of correspondences between his films and those of Yasujiro Ozu, and he would probably have nodded sagely, complemented your perspicacity, told of how he saw *Tokyo Story* when it opened in Paris, and enjoyed your preening delight at having a pet theory confirmed. Yet most of the 'correspondences' that swim by, like tiny tropical fish in the aquarium of his cinema, are, if one is inclined to be less than credulous, little more than in-jokes, referential amusements based on the most fleeting of associations, spontaneous moments of pure wordplay. For instance, in the French and Spanish versions of Franco's 1965 film *The Diabolical Dr. Z*, the villainess receives a telephone call from an unseen character referred to as 'Bresson', who informs her that "*a man has escaped*".<sup>22</sup> The allusion is to French filmmaker Robert Bresson and his marvellous and indelible film *A Man Escaped* (1956) and, should you notice it, it's either a playful nod from Franco to a director he admired, or, as critic Alain Petit has suggested, one of scriptwriter Jean-Claude Carrière's little jokes. Either way, it joins an ever growing list of 'references' in Franco that can amuse the cinéaste without necessarily shedding significant light on surrounding themes. There is always a temptation to read into such moments, but beware: to leap from momentary wordplay to an assumption of meaning tempts absurdity. (A wider philosophical and thematic gulf between two directors it is difficult to imagine. Bresson, a Catholic obsessed by themes of redemption, measures every split second, every beat, every moment of every shot. Franco? Well, let's say that for him, redemption can go to hell and rigour is not so firm, except maybe between the legs.)

Conceptualism is just not Franco's thing, but this doesn't reduce him. There's no shame in approaching a film with just a loose sense of what it might be about, nor with chucking in a handful of film buff jokes as you go along. As Jean-Luc Godard himself noted about his own filmmaking process: "*Ever since my first film, I have always said I am going to prepare the script more carefully, and each time I see yet another chance to improvise, to do it all in the shooting, without applying the cinema to something. My impression is that when someone like Demy or Bresson shoots a film, he has an idea of the world he is trying to apply to the cinema, or else – which comes to the same thing – an idea of cinema which he applies to the world.*"<sup>23</sup> Whatever claims one can make for Jess Franco, this is surely not one of them! Instead, Franco is uncannily like Godard himself: speaking about the shooting of *Pierrot le fou*, Godard remarked, "*It is a completely spontaneous film. I have never been so worried as I was two days before shooting began. I had nothing, nothing at all. Oh well, I had the book.*

*And a certain number of locations. I knew it would take place by the sea.*"<sup>24</sup> How many Franco films must have begun with exactly this meagre tally of preparations! For Godard, filmmaking is something that arises from the existential moment of living, not something to be mapped out to the nth degree, so for once there is a genuine philosophical connection to be made here, a matter of significance, between Franco and one of the 'greats' of art cinema. It's not just a matter of a passing joke. For Franco, life and filming are indivisible. Thus we can say with some confidence that these two directors, so very different in so many ways, really do share an outlook which guides their cinema; an outlook beyond wordplay, but rather an ethos and an attitude to cinema and life. As Godard put it, "*The cinema is optimistic because everything is always possible, nothing is ever prohibited: all you need is to be in touch with life.*"<sup>25</sup>

Part of the challenge in writing about Franco is that artistic qualities emerge from work that the director himself says has no meaning. Indeed, if we treat meaning as something separate, somehow deposited into or scooped out of a film, rather than something that arises from it simply being what it is, then I would have to agree; in those terms there is no 'meaning' in Franco's cinema. The problem actually resides in the question: it's a lot less interesting to ask what Franco's films *mean* than to ask what it is they *do*. This misapprehension of the role of meaning is addressed in a satirical way in Franco's 1967 films *Succubus*, in which various characters pontificate about art while playing word association games (psychoanalysis being a well-trodden route to finding out what films are 'really about').

Often the most thrilling, exotic sensations arise from the sketchiest and haziest of Jess Franco's films, as if the imprecision of scripting and the haste of production allow us to sidestep reality and enter a parallel world, one that has not been too heavily overwritten with our own. This is why his films in the 1970s and 1980s strike me as ultimately more artistically interesting than his work in the 1960s (with a couple of key exceptions). A greater degree of care and attention makes the early films a lot more accessible (and they remain extremely enjoyable) but once the pace shifts into overdrive in the early 1970s, Franco starts to experience a rush of speed and it changes the landscape of his work, turning the familiar unfamiliar; under these conditions, as haste and compulsive spontaneity create a sense of derangement, strange sensations are summoned that do not exist in the orderly environs of the sixties films.

Nothing in Franco's interviews ever really addressed this, and when I met him in 2010 he was unwilling or unable to respond to my own questions on aesthetics or the elusive traits and currents in his work. He did, however, enjoy listening to me trying to explain them for myself! Some may assume that this means he's toying with us, that a snide sort of con-trick is being perpetrated. This is a common fear among those who are wary of 'intellectualism'; that the artist is quietly mocking the viewer who tries to make sense of some random piece of nonsense. Yes, Franco always presented himself in a sardonic light. Interviews highlight a satirical personality, who

sees foolishness in the pretension of his more 'serious' countrymen in the film industry. He made countless statements to do with his cinema being nothing more than pure entertainment. This man-of-the-people posture, however, does little to explain the strange and disorientating nature of his finest work. He may have loved Hollywood cinema, he may have idolised John Ford and Robert Siodmak, but he pushed the boundaries of film style in a way that owed more to the cinema's avant-garde than the dynamic narrative structures of the American studio system. That he could not or would not expand on this verbally does not mean it's pointless to regard his work in this way. As we reach for connections between Franco and the avant-garde, it's worth bearing in mind Susan Sontag's words on the currents passing through art cinema in the 1960s: "*The result of the new narration, then, is a tendency to de-dramatise. In, for example, Journey to Italy or L'avventura, we are told what is ostensibly a story. But it is a story which proceeds by omissions. The audience is being haunted, as it were, by the sense of a lost or absent meaning to which even the artist himself has no access. The avowal of agnosticism on the artist's part may look like unseriousness or contempt for the audience. But when the artist declares that he doesn't 'know' any more than the audience knows, what he is saying is that all the meaning resides in the work itself. There is no surplus, nothing 'behind' it. Such works seem to lack sense or meaning only to the extent that entrenched critical attitudes have established as a dictum for the narrative arts that meaning resides solely in this surplus of 'reference' outside the work—to the 'real world' or to the artist's intention. But this is, at best, an arbitrary ruling.*"<sup>26</sup>

## MIND CONTROL

*"My sleep was delightfully deep and dreamless. But I wakened with a sense of lassitude and melancholy, which, however, did not exceed a degree that was almost luxurious [...] For some nights I slept profoundly; but still every morning I felt the same lassitude, and a languor weighed upon me all day [...] A strange melancholy was stealing over me, a melancholy that I would not have interrupted. Dim thoughts of death began to open, and an idea that I was slowly sinking took gentle, and, somehow, not unwelcome, possession of me. If it was sad, the tone of mind which this induced was also sweet. Whatever it might be, my soul acquiesced in it."*

from *Carmilla* by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu

Mind control is a constant theme in Franco's cinema, ranging from the surgical lobotomies and technological devices of *The Awful Dr. Orloff* (1962), *Dr. Orloff's Monster* (1964) and *The Diabolical Dr. Z* (1965), to the psychological hypno-assassin fantasies of *Nightmares Come at Night* (1969), *Voodoo Passion* (1977) and *Mil sexes tiene la noche* (1983). Along with Sadean fantasies, incest fantasies and the travails of women in prison, it's one of the hottest wellsprings in Franco's cinema. So why is it so fascinating to Franco?

For a start, I think it's because, for a man who spent much of his life peering down a viewfinder at a group of people who've

agreed to act out his fantasies, the theme of mind control had deep associations with the creative act. The director is the great Svengali, the cast are his willing (if sometimes truculent) puppets, simulating all manner of crimes or depredations on his instruction. Likewise the audience, if the filmmaker is on top of his game, are steered psychologically this way and that: their emotions, their heart-rates, their anxieties and arousals, their fears and desires are nudged and guided, stroked and cajoled and persuaded by the images projected on the screen. Mind control is thus a wonderfully flexible and potent narrative metaphor for the cinema; it allows Franco to be self-reflexive without the need for making a film-within-a-film, or a film about filmmaking (notably, he only ever filmed a film crew three times: comedically in *Vampiresas 1930* in 1961, fleetingly in *The Sexy Darlings* in 1971, and more provocatively in the bizarre sci-fi/horror/comedy *El sexo está loco*, in 1981). Franco, however, was no Orloff or Zimmer, crudely invading the brains and bodies of his servants with metaphorical scalpels and electrodes. In other words, he was not the sort to bully actors; he allowed them freedom to improvise within the scenarios he created. But this is simply the sign of the master manipulator. Don't crack the whip, you get better results if you let the actors feel in control. The manipulator knows that if you offend a person's sense of autonomy they're likely to resist you; better to convince them they're free, and bend them to your will more subtly. It's a strategy that successful film directors employ all the time; interviews with actors are full of assertions about 'creative freedom', the director who 'directs without directing', who allows the actor to bring their own ideas to the table, etc etc. The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was to convince the world he didn't exist; Franco could make the actors feel as though they were free, whilst drawing them, gently and surreptitiously, into service of his own private fantasies. His fascination with mind control is thus firstly a reflection upon his own role as a purveyor of highly personal fantasies in what is ostensibly a collaborative medium.

However, for Franco, mind control is about much more than artistic self-consciousness. It's about the borderline between surrender and rape, agency and subservience, free will and slavery. It's a zone of contestation and ambiguity, where rights and wrongs shade into grey. Between coercion and persuasion, between ravishment and seduction, lies a complex land of ambivalence. Just as Charles Manson persuaded a group of drug-addled hippies to go out and kill, without having to lay a finger on the victims himself, Franco's Svengalis use the force of their personalities to influence weaker-minded individuals to enact crimes on their behalf. This is where the mind control narratives dovetail with Franco's Sadean tales; they're about the strong exerting power over the weak, with the weak often skewered for allowing it to happen, and the strong sometimes celebrated for stepping outside of hypocritical morality.

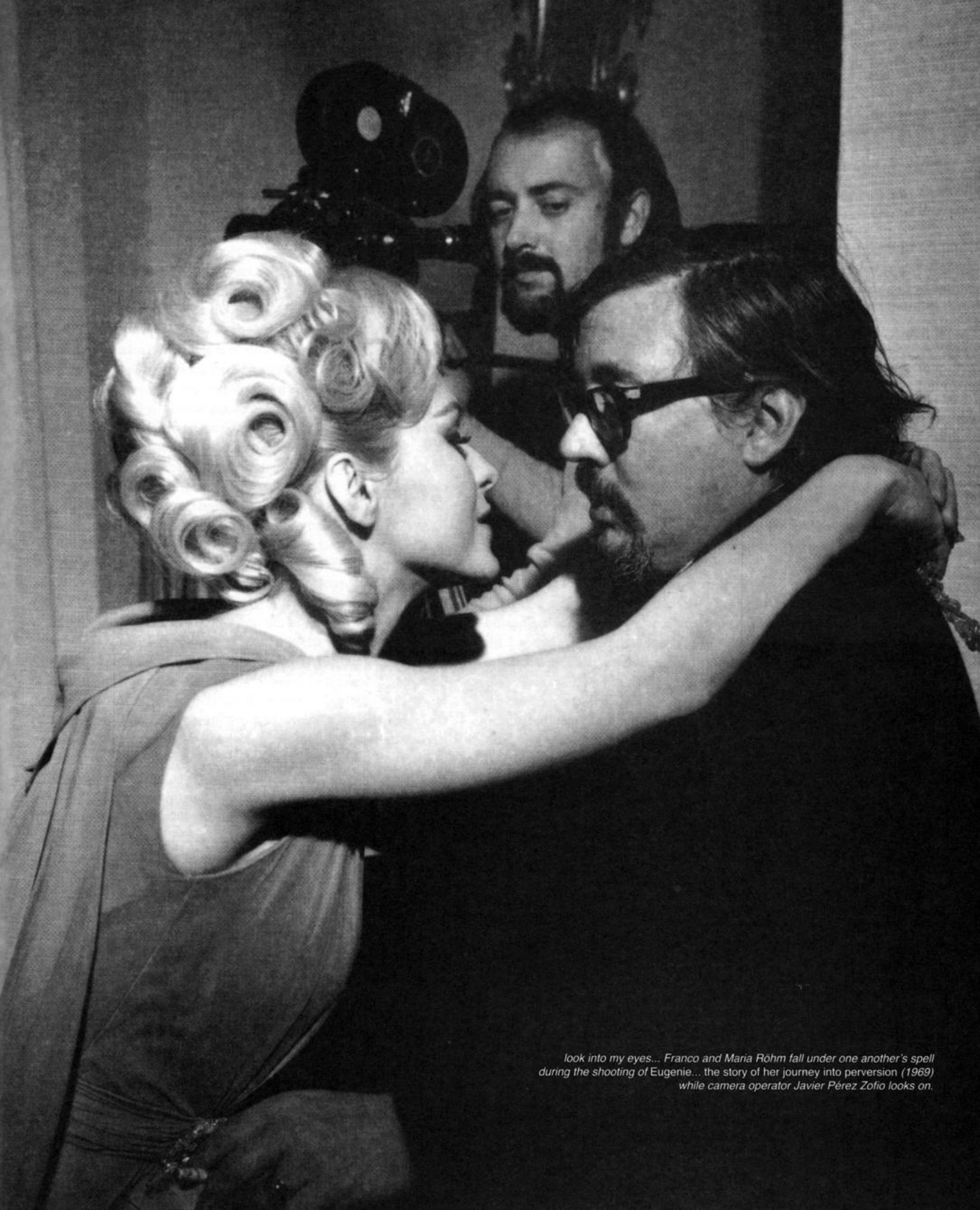
Franco's mind-control stories come in four configurations: male-on-male, male-on-female, female-on-male and female-on-

female. *The Awful Dr. Orlof*, *Dr. Orloff's Monster*, *Sadisterotica*, *Kiss Me Monster*, *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein*, *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein* and *El siniestro Dr. Orloff* feature male controllers and male objects of control, and in these cases the theme is part of an exploration of classic horror tropes. Orloff's relationship to Morpho, Fisherman's relationship to Andros, Dr. Frankenstein's relationship to his Monster, these are from the dawn of horror cinema; they are riffs on Cesare the murderous hypnotised sleepwalker in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920), and to a lesser extent the 'Igor' figure commonly associated with Dwight Frye in *Frankenstein* (1931).<sup>27</sup> With the possible exception of the (implied) gay villains and their musclemen slaves in *Kiss Me Monster*, sexuality does not play a part in the relationship between controller and controlled in these films. It's only when Franco turns to the other formations that eroticism becomes important.

Male-on-female mind control appears in *Succubus* (where it's induced psychically), *The Blood of Fu Manchu* (chemically), *La venganza del doctor Mabuse* (technologically), *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein* (mesmerically), *The Sinister Eyes of Dr. Orloff* (chemically), *Sola ante el terror* (supernaturally) and *Mil sexos tiene la noche* (psychically). The female-on-female version occurs in *The Diabolical Dr. Z* (induced surgically), *Les Cauchemars naissent la nuit* (ambiguously), *Shining Sex* (through means of an alien unguent), *Voodoo Passion* (magically) and *Ópalo de fuego* (mesmerically). The fourth possible variant, female-on-male mind control, occurs in *Attack of the Robots* (technologically), *Blue Rita* (through use of an unguent), *Viaje a Bangkok, ataid incluido* (psychically), and *Macumba sexual* (fleetingly, and supernaturally). Not surprisingly, Franco was least interested in showing female-on-male mind control. It's not that he resists the notion of females dominating men; far from it, as even a cursory glance through his films will attest. It's because the screen would thus be taken up by the male character to an unacceptable degree. Within the Gothic sphere mentioned earlier he's happy to depict the male-on-male combination (one could if one wished unpack the unconscious homoeroticism of these films), but in the far more blatantly eroticised sphere of women controlling men, he's not so interested. The only really erotic depiction of male suffering comes in *Blue Rita* (1977), made for Erwin C. Dietrich's company and starring Dietrich's resident stud Eric Falk. Franco seemingly felt almost no erotic thrill from watching men, and so their roles are less important; in terms of arousal they're often surplus to requirements, and Franco's most intensely erotic and obsessive films sideline them drastically.

There are numerous subsets and variants of the mind-control theme, a fact which in itself shows how important this is to Franco; he evidently spent time turning the idea around and around in his head, looking for new facets. One subset would be *seduction*. Of course, if we include seduction in *all* its forms that opens the door too wide; I'll therefore stick with instances in which some exterior force or power is involved; namely vampirism, magic, or the use of drugs. Vampiric seduction occurs in *Count Dracula*, *Vampyros*





*look into my eyes... Franco and Maria Röhms fall under one another's spell  
during the shooting of Eugenie... the story of her journey into perversion (1969)  
while camera operator Javier Pérez Zofio looks on.*

Lesbos, *Dracula's Daughter* and *Female Vampire*; magical seduction is key to *Macumba sexual*; and drugs are used to facilitate seduction in *The Girl from Rio*, *Eugenie... the Story of Her Journey into Perversion*, *Die Sklavinnen*, *Eugenie (Historia de una perversion)*, *Blue Rita*, *Je brûle de partout*, *Gemidos de placer*, *Lilian (la virgen pervertida)*, *The Sexual Story of O* and *Esclavas del crimen*. Among the oddities and one-offs: a sister uses the promise of sex to cajole her incestuously inclined brother into committing murders in *Bloody Moon*, the Devil literally makes them do it in *The Demons*, and the supernatural influence of a controlling father propels his daughter into a string of murders in *Al otro lado del espejo*. More tenuously, leading into a debate about the nature of free will, one might mention the troubled killer in *The Sadistic Baron von Klaus* who is led astray by the influence of a book extolling the beliefs of a libertine ancestor, and who believes himself haunted by the ancestor's spirit, and the sexually abused heroine in *Sinner* who feels that responsibility for the disordered and unhappy course of her life lies with the man who raped her in her teens. Finally, sex itself is a form of mind control in Franco. Men become enamoured of women they know are dangerous, but pursue them nonetheless; in *She Killed in Ecstasy*, the men being hunted by the female protagonist seem to know they are meeting their nemesis, but persist in playing along with their own destruction due to their desire for the woman who delivers it.

So what else can we observe about the mind-control relationship played out time and time again Franco's cinema? I find it striking that broadly speaking, Franco's mind-control narratives foreground the victim. This is not, however, a sign of empathy; instead it's symptomatic of an all-consuming voyeurism. Franco's camera does not sympathise, even when his narratives do. The camera is simply fascinated, the way that Attila Tanner is fascinated by the murderous Radecks in *Eugenie*. The women being manipulated in these mind-control storylines are the subject of intense scrutiny; often, the films follow them for minutes on end as they stalk and kill, or as they go through the motions of sexual acts beyond their conscious control. As Franco hones the formula, we see less and less of the controller, the Svengali; he or she diminishes, withdraws from the scene. They are simply a pretext; the object of desire, the focus of interest, is the victim. Part of the appeal of the mind-control fantasy is that it removes the active agent from the screen, and focusses relentlessly upon the reactions of a troubled, put-upon or dominated victim. They take on the role of 'agent' in the drama, but ironically. They are passive victims forced to act the role of aggressor. In terms of the scopophilic urge, the appeal is obvious; one laps up the nightmare struggle of the victim, their subservience while acting out terrible crimes or obscene sexual acts. It's a delicious spectacle. The controller recedes from the frame because the camera (and the viewer) assumes their role; we are the ones who see as the controller must see, psychically observing the successful result of control. Franco's camera is the supernatural or mesmeric device by which power is asserted over

the victims. He is Cagliostro (*The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein*); he is Mabuse (*La venganza del doctor Mabuse*); he is the 'creator' of Lorna (*Succubus*).

And yet there is still more to it than this. One thing that alienates viewers who do not take to Franco's work is its slowness. Another is the feeling that the narratives are not strongly motivated. Franco films can seem opiated, slumberous, lacking in energy and dynamism. This is often because the stories reduce or subvert the sense of agency that propels conventional drama. One does not enjoy the usual identification with problem-solving characters: we do not ride pillion with protagonists as they deal with 'inciting incidents' or overcome obstacles to desire, we do not experience vicarious satisfaction as they seek and attain control and autonomy. Instead, Franco's films can seem 'infected' by the passivity of his characters. This is because in a profound way they seek to experience the loss of control, the surrender of autonomy, the dissolution of the will. The disappearance from the scene of the controlling figure leaves a power vacuum; the viewer either enjoys this sensation of suspension and absence, or they are bored, repulsed. Franco's cinema revels in the creation of ellipses, still points, limpid and borderless fugue states, suspended moments that dilate to fill whole scenes, with almost no substantive 'action'... yet still they can hold our attention. There is a kind of metaphysical suction here; one feels the pull of the image as a curious absence that nevertheless draws one's awareness; a gentle incitement to watch: it's delicate, but if you can feel it, it's strangely difficult to break.

Another advantageous offshoot of the mind control fantasy is the way it silences the characters, resulting in prolonged scenes without dialogue in which a hypnotised or otherwise mentally dominated figure moves without speaking. This can be seen in many Franco films; Lorna in *Succubus* wandering through Lisbon under the illusion she's free, committing murder on the orders of her mysterious 'creator'; Cynthia in *Shining Sex* snuffing out the holders of esoteric knowledge who oppose the transdimensional Alpha; Anna in *Les Cauchemars naissent la nuit*, Susan in *Voodoo Passion* and Irina in *Mil sexos tiene la noche*, murdering people they barely know on behalf of wicked and manipulative lovers. This suits Franco's predilection for visual storytelling and his disdain for scripting. There are relatively few Franco films in which language is key to one's enjoyment and appreciation of the film. Once we have enough information to understand the relationships between characters (who is a sister, who is a lover, who is a father or brother or friend), the rest is usually pretty basic. According to Howard Vernon, or Antonio Mayans, and others who worked with Franco, the scripts were usually just a few pages long, listing scenes and plot instructions, with a few pointers for dialogue. And as already noted, according to sound editor Gérard Kikoïne Franco did not always supervise the dubbing of his films and left merely a few pages of loose instructions about what characters say, leaving the precise form of words to the dubbing supervisor! Such, then, is Franco's love of words. It's interesting that his favourite of his

Gothic horror films was *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein*, a film in which the entire script would scarcely fill one sheet of A4 paper. With this in mind, the appeal of the mind-control story is obvious; once it has been established, the movements of the submissive character, the choreography of their subservience, is the whole show; speech is scarcely required.

#### BURLESQUE AND THE PRIVATE SHOW

*"For me a nightclub is a normal place where strange things can happen."*  
Franco to Kevin Collins

Eroticism finds repeated expression in Franco's work through depictions of strippers and the atmospheric allure of the strip-joint. Hotels are more frequent, but strip-clubs are the Franco location par excellence. So why, when the culture of filmmaking in the 1970s and 1980s allowed just about any kind of sexual situation to be played out onscreen, did Jess Franco keep coming back to this historically rooted and quite traditional source of pulchritude?

Burlesque has a long and vibrant cultural background. At its best it's an art-form, a sensual piece of theatre that oscillates between teasing concealment and fleeting revelation. Since the advent of hardcore pornography, however, burlesque has been consigned by and large to the realm of nostalgia or kitsch. As with most cultural forms in the postmodern era, it's now a parody of itself, lost in the meat-grinder of period pastiche in which allusion and referentiality take the place of authenticity (an ironic fate of course, considering that burlesque itself was a play of masks). For Franco, however, there is no irony or detachment in his love of burlesque. The strip-club is the single most frequent social setting in a Franco film. There's little doubt that Franco as a young man must have experienced erotic pleasure through the public medium of the strip-show, especially as he spent plenty of time in Paris in the 1950s.

Beyond burlesque lies the 'private show', which – truth be told – is what many strip-joint punters probably wanted all along. Those irritating tourists at the next table? Those drunken labourers leering at the girls, reliving their high school bunk-off fantasies? Let them disappear like cigarette smoke into an extractor fan. The obnoxious cackle of fellow revellers diminishes, the lights go down, and the focus is purely on the body, writhing and dancing for a solitary spectator: you.

The spectacle of burlesque performance and the look-but-don't-touch thrill of the private show are obsessively intertwined in Franco's cinema, and a Jess Franco film offering neither of these pleasures after 1967 is rare indeed. If there's a trend in his cinema here, it's that public display recedes in favour of the private show: at times so private, whispers Jess, that the character doesn't realise she's performing. This is the second most prevalent image of Franco's cinema: women writhing in prolonged, almost epileptic convulsions of desire, as if the female body is about to erupt to

reveal some chimerical effluent, some ectoplasmic substance; desire made visible at last. The fantasy at play here comes from a slightly more mature point in the psyche; from the sense of woman having interiority, a power and passion within her that is not simply a mask or a costume or a male projection. It's animalistic energy, out of control, propelling women into contortions of frightening and fascinating voltage.

But the 'unsuspecting' woman is, of course, also an actress, well aware of the circumstance of her display. Franco is not a sneak, nor a fool. He does not truly spy. Instead he offers the illusion of spying, with women who are skilled at mimicking obliviousness to excite his camera eye. In fact to the contrary, *Les Grandes Emmerdeuses* and *Midnight Party* begin with nude women addressing the camera directly, exposing their bodies and spreading their vaginas, making the cinema screen the stage upon which a provocative one-to-one sex show is enacted. Thus the two layers of public and private performance are united by the medium of film. The private passion of women, and their public licentiousness, are merged. Perhaps this is why Franco shoots film so repetitively, so relentlessly? It's where he really *finds* women: two fantasies brought into one through the lens. Only here can desire be unified. In the flesh, the situation remains bipartite, either social or private. In cinema the two can be brought together, alchemised into a symbolic aggregate.<sup>28</sup>

#### THE HOTEL QUOTIDIAN

*"This hotel doesn't have any guests. Or a manager. Or an owner."* -  
Olivia in *Mansion of the Living Dead* (1982)

Hotels are immensely important in Franco's films, especially during the 1970s and early 1980s. When you scrutinise his filmography, counting how many films he made per year, for how many producers, in so many countries, it's not hard to see why. For Franco, hotels *were* home. Consequently, his films reveal a transitory psychogeography marked by impermanence and contingency. Jess Franco traversed the boundaries between nations on what seems to have been virtually a weekly basis. Different currencies, different customs, different films. The strange rootless vibe that arises from his work is intimately bound up with his lifestyle. Perhaps this seems hard to believe, given that Franco was enjoying all of the social and financial rewards that come with a busy career making movies, but when one stops to consider his life as it must have been lived, his increasing sense of rootlessness is obvious; jetting back and forth between this and that country, today Brazil, tomorrow Turkey, this week shooting one film, the next week another, globetrotting between Rome, Rio, London, Las Palmas, Barcelona, Paris, Lisbon, Zürich, Istanbul... Life for Franco became ever more fragmented as the sixties switched to the seventies, his sense of belonging anywhere in particular rendered tenuous and fleeting. The Spanish authorities were squeezing him out of the body-politic of Spanish cinema, and the fickle financial



arrangements of his foreign production associates meant there was precious little sense of security. Franco was a jet-setting gadfly, hopping from flight to flight, continent to continent, hotel to hotel, script to script, always juggling plans for the next project with the one he was making today. This rootlessness and insecurity finds oblique expression in his work.

One of Franco's strongest assets is his unsentimental approach to the grime and squalor of city low life. Some of his finest films are set in a netherworld of city back-streets, subterranean bars and anonymous boulevards, red light districts filmed at 7am, out of hours clubs and shabby hotels and cheap apartments. Simultaneously he has a tremendous talent for situating desire within the mundane. There is no ceremonious sentimentality for his sex scenes, no billowing lace curtains and rustling silk bedspreads. Lust exists right there amid the sprawl and clutter of the everyday. Franco can depict sex as a subjective magical theatre but not without showing the grimy stage entrance, the piss-soaked artists' exit, the alleyway where the cleaners and staff are deposited, the passageways where the actors wait for their cue, flies undone, tits out, nipples getting that extra tweak in readiness for close-ups. A procession of wood-chip bed-heads, brown curtains, ghostly hotel furniture, all the panoply of 1970s design from expensive glamour to featureless tat, from kitschy modernism to chic-goes-downmarket. The matter-of-fact verisimilitude he brought to many of his films in the 1970s, capturing a sense of what it was like to live the life of a rootless alienated pleasure-seeker in the 1970s, suggests far more than a simple wallow in the lubricious amusement of sex. In *Al otro lado del espejo*, a scene in a daylight bar, its dancefloor lit through windows all around, conveys a sort of stark mid-afternoon ambience, with attempted sexual liaisons played out in unflattering broad daylight. The feeling of a boozy afternoon is amplified by the stagger of the heroine as she walks home through a Madeiran suburb with her suitor, and the camera shakes and wobbles to greet them. It's late afternoon in a quiet residential street, with lowering sunlight, the drinks giving everything a lilt of absurdity. Franco is a great photographer of morbid daylight (and let's be clear, whatever the credits say, in the 1970s he shot a lot of these films himself; the credits for various cinematographers are often just fig leaves to avoid him looking like a jack of all trades). And yet there's lust and eroticism, real and tangible, lodged in the interstices of this quotidian array.

### THE SEA AND THE COAST

The sea is the most regular actor in Franco's repertory cast. It's a foreground element in over half of the films, and a background element in most of the others. 'Sex and Death by the Sea' pretty much covers about three quarters of Franco's career! More precisely, it's the coast that obsesses him. He sometimes uses it to mark an arrival (*99 Women*; *A Virgin among the Living Dead*, *Un silencio de tumba*, *Voodoo Passion*, *Abberaciones sexuales de los*

*mujer casada*), showing significant characters at the start of their filmic journey in a way that carries with it strong associations of rootlessness, being far away from home, a stranger in a strange land. More importantly, though, the coastline carries a symbolic charge. It's a boundary, a liminal space between two different but inter-related states. On the one hand, solidity, certainty, definition; on the other, fluidity, uncertainty, dissolution. The coastline can be the end or the beginning of something. It's also both of these things at the same time, two contrasting states of being condensed into a single image. This sense of a threshold between opposites gives rise to an elusive otherness, suggesting a portal through which the everyday world can be escaped. Among the films in which beaches and coastlines are used in a metaphysical way are *Succubus* (Lorna's 'dream castle' located right at the sea's edge), *Venus in Furs* (Jimmy's existential confusion and his mystical encounter with death occur on the beach), *Vampyros Lesbos* (the seaside home of Countess Nadine speaks of her supernatural allure in the same way cobwebs and castles spoke of Dracula), *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein* (Cagliostro's palace of sadistic supernatural pleasure overlooks the sea), *Les Exploits érotiques de Maciste dans l'Atlantide* (survivors of the lost kingdom of Atlantis cling to the rocks of a nearby magical island), *Shining Sex* (a coastal boat ride embodies a trip into deepest abstraction), *Das Bildnis der Doriana Gray* (Doriana's coastal mansion, echoing with her erotic obsessions), *Macumba sexual* (in which the heroine is delivered into the hands of a witch simply by watching a sailing ship leaving the harbour), and *Mansion of the Living Dead* (in which a deserted beach expresses a world outside of reality).

There is a sexual frisson too: these omnipresent shots of beaches and coastlines suggest a hovering at the brink, a desire to remain poised at the turbulent edge of pleasure, rather as one may wish to defer orgasm and remain forever at its ecstatic border (based on a viewing of his work Franco was clearly a man for whom the extended tease is a great deal more interesting than the release. Between sex and desire; doing 'it', and wanting 'it'; the fish on the line, and the one that got away: in the space between pleasure and the torment of deferral lie nearly all of Franco's strategies of eroticism). And of course, no list of seaside connotations would be complete without acknowledging that the beach is where women take off their clothes (I won't list examples; seek and ye shall find...)

Franco's films speak of our ceaseless fascination with the coast.<sup>29</sup> Spain's dramatic and beautiful coastline draws visitors in their millions every summer. Why? Most people would say that we head toward the sea when we want to 'escape'. But in a sense do we also go to the edge because we want to jump off? Do we want to be swept away by an unexpected wave? There is a darkness to the sea, even when illuminated by the most dazzling Mediterranean sunshine. Our fascination with it cannot entirely be diminished and domesticated by the triviality of the culture that springs up alongside it: sticks of rock, candy-floss, ice-creams, deckchairs, tanning lotion. All of these mundane accoutrements distract us

from the real reason we flock to the sea; for the sense of being at the edge. However safely decorated, with donkey rides and bikinis and beach volleyball, the edge gives us pause. The open horizon shows the clutter of our lives to be transient, and as we look to the sea we feel a heart's lift of freedom from the mundane, and a dizzying sense of the eternal.

If coastal destinations speak of an atavistic desire to see an end to things, then among the connotations we need to list are darkness and danger; in a word, death. The sea connects with death in Franco's films, and the coast is a place where killers reside: consider the sex-murderers in *Eugenie... the Story of Her Journey into Perversion*, *Eugenie (Historia de una perversión)*, *Gemidos de placer*, *Lilian, la virgen pervertida* and *The Sexual Story of O*; the death-dealing villain of *La venganza del doctor Mabuse*; the glamorous but deadly bloodsuckers in *Vampyros Lesbos*, *Dracula's Daughter* and *Female Vampire*; the vengeful femme fatale in *She Killed in Ecstasy*; the cannibal aristocrats in *Countess Perverse*; the double-crossing crime boss in *Kiss Me Killer*; the destructive patriarch and his vengeful stepdaughter in *The Hot Nights of Linda*; the rapacious witches in *Lorna... the Exorcist* and *Macumba sexual*; the cannibal monster in *Devil Hunter*; and the haunted schizophrenic in *Sola ante el terror*. Death occurs in coastal settings in all of these films, as well as *La muerte silba un blues*, *Night of the Skull*, *Tender and Perverse Emanuelle*, *Midnight Party*, *La casa de las mujeres perdidas* and *Bahia blanca*. Even the prisons of the WIP films tend to sit upon the coast (*99 Women*, *Devil's Island Lovers*, *Barbed Wire Dolls*, *Women behind Bars*, *Sadomania*). The thanatological aspect of this seaside obsession is dramatised in its starkest form in *Countess Perverse* (and later in the partial remake, *The Sexual Story of O*) in which a despairing man deliberately drowns himself while carrying a dead woman into the sea.

Finally, one cannot respond to Franco's obsession with coastlines without thinking about a special sense of time implied by the action of the ceaseless ocean beating against the shore, century after century. Each grain of sand is a rock smashed to dust over eons. Little wonder that we speak about 'the sands of time'. Beaches are cosmic, elemental. They are images of time. Franco films so many of them, so many seas and tides, that the fractal splendour of the material world enters into the grain of his cinema (funny, isn't it, that we talk about 'grain' for the texture of film). And if you want to play around with the audience's sense of time, then stripping away the transient details of human life and emphasising the ancient forces of creation is a good way to initiate the process...

"When you record the moment, you record the death of the moment."  
from the short film *Camera* by David Cronenberg

"There are other kinds of narration besides those based on a 'story'. For instance, the material can be treated as a thematic resource from which different, perhaps concurrent, narrative structures can be derived as variations. Once this possibility is consciously entertained, it becomes clear that the formal mandates of such a construction must differ from those of a 'story' (or even a set of parallel stories). The difference will probably appear most striking in the treatment of time."

Susan Sontag on Ingmar Bergman's *Persona*

"Marvellous to live without a sense of time."  
Olivia in *The Hot Nights of Linda*

Time in the films of Jess Franco is elastic, a subjective distention of the mind, prone to sudden shifts in density, moving through clusters of loosely arranged events and then pulling away from itself as if expanding cosmically. This sensation can occur anywhere; it's not the sole province of the best films, it erupts in some of the shonkiest and shoddiest too. What's striking is that it feels self-similar across so many different films. Time dilation is a fingerprint that Franco seems to leave on his work whenever he gets the chance. His technique spins the moment into fabulous contours, and draws the viewer into a state of passionate contemplation or whirling disconnection. An almost liturgical seriousness attends his summoning of this timeless state of suspension. And because suspension of time cannot help but rub against the passage of time that conveys it, a paradoxical frisson is achieved. Film, moving at twenty-four frames per second, locks a moment forever in a rectangle of celluloid, frozen icons of pleasure, yet away they go, slipping through the camera... away, away, always away.

I believe that the dominant structural hallmark of Franco's cinema is his manipulation of time, in particular time as it's experienced through desire. It's widely agreed that the speed of time is not experienced as a constant: it can seem to 'fly' or slow down depending on our situation. During sexual arousal adrenaline is released into the body and this dilates the blood vessels, increasing the flow of blood and making time seem to run more slowly as the 'internal' pace speeds up. Meanwhile the neurotransmitter phenylethylamine triggers the release of dopamine in the pleasure centres of the brain, causing feelings of bliss and excitement. What Franco seeks to do in a great many of his narcotic, hallucinogenic sex scenes, is to reproduce this compact of sensation by means of camera technique, editing and music. Note that Franco does this by manipulation of film style, not simply by relying on the sexual act he's filming in the real world. His best work, liberated from narrative and genre, is an act of erotic exploration, revealing and distilling the underlying dynamics of arousal. He was a voyeur who

gained sexual enjoyment from watching others, from conceiving and then filming sex between other people. His scopophilia is intense, his arousal predicated on gathering up the maximum visual harvest. His camera probes, it seeks out, it wanders lovingly across the folds and groves and mountainous terrains of the human body. Jess Franco conveys the sense of timelessness and suspension that occurs during sex, concentrating that erotic suspension through a compulsive voyeurism.

In Franco's vision of eroticism, over and over again, time's celluloid slips through the aperture of consciousness, in a state of tension with sex as perpetual present. The moment cascades, it is sensed and then surrendered. What feeling does this cause, amid the sensations of arousal and the pleasures of contemplation? Is it not that "strange melancholy [...] a melancholy that I would not have interrupted" from Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, which we looked at in relation to Franco's mind-control narratives? In *Carmilla* this melancholy is the spell of a vampire; in other words the siren-call of death, the ultimate come-on, the final seductress. The lure of death within desire is at the core of Franco's melancholy. Miss Death, the ultimate stripper, taking it all off, right down to the bones... The sweet ache of melancholia embedded in arousal is everywhere in his cinema; it's what distinguishes his version of eroticism from the blind garrulous humping that takes place in the work of directors like Joe D'Amato or Alain Payet, or the defensive jolliness that afflicts so many others. The delirium of sex comes from the sustaining of a charged perpetual present – and yet that present is always already sliding away. From the paradise of erotic bliss to the fall of each moment, over and over, present surrenders to past. Overwhelming pleasure is shadowed by melancholy, until it's hard to say which is which. As ecstasy floods the mind, the moment flies away, constantly, and this slipstream of passion generates a mounting sense of loss that folds back in time to haunt the moment. It's a captivating sadness, keen and biting, impossible to extricate from the passion that so barely precedes it. Ecstasy is always leaving; pleasure is always passing. The mind must make sense of two conflicting feelings, jouissance and loss, and it does this by fusing them. At a certain peak of ecstasy the brain can take no more and the subject ceases to be aware of his or her self (a moment captured in David Cronenberg's *Videodrome* – another scopophilic work – when Max and Nikki are having sex on the 'Videodrome set' and for a second we see the chamber empty, just a room and a grated floor, with no writhing bodies, no human presence at all).

The element of voyeurism is crucial. This intricate atemporality, in which lust and melancholy become each other, is far more easily detected through voyeurism than through sexual activity itself. In physical sex with a partner or partners, the concentration upon physical movement, muscular and aerobic intensity, the influx of sense impressions from someone else, creates so much live signal that the more subtle temporal effect is pushed down in the mix. It doesn't disappear, and the longer sex continues the

more apparent it becomes, but in the unpredictable torrent of the other, in the flood of passionate activity, it's ameliorated by pure sensation. Voyeurism, however, does away with all this. The signal is honed, focussed, the louder harmonics are stripped away, the unpredictable cluster chords of contact, the complex riffs and melodies of physical motion are silenced. Voyeuristic arousal frees the mind to perceive time as it slips through the aperture of consciousness, and this slipping is both erotic and melancholic.

Once experienced, this sense of pleasure both filling to the brim and pouring away into the past creates a compulsion to maintain the sensation. I believe this explains why sex addiction is such a common theme in Franco's cinema (see *The Girl from Rio*, *Shining Sex*, *Das Bildnis der Doriana Gray*, *Blue Rita*, *Je brûle de partout*), and his never-ending filming schedules are a manifestation of it. Franco was a sex addict of sorts, but because his erotic preference was voyeuristic his obsession, his addiction, was centred on filming. Weird, unsettling experiences like *Lorna... the Exorcist* or *Shining Sex* treat desire as a sort of manipulative drug that won't let go. In Franco's erotic cinema, ecstasy demands that we stoke the furnace constantly, to generate not only lustful enjoyment but also a constant chain of surrendered moments disappearing into the past. This compulsion runs riot in the erotic scenarios of *Nightmares Come at Night*, *Vampyros Lesbos*, *How to Seduce a Virgin*, *Les Gloutonnes*, *Le Miroir obscène*, *Female Vampire*, *The Hot Nights of Linda*, *Lorna... the Exorcist*, *Les Grandes Emmerdeuses*, *Shining Sex*, *Das Bildnis der Doriana Gray*, *Je brûle de partout*, *Aberraciones sexuales de una mujer casada*, *Eugénie (Historia de una perversión)*, *Macumba sexual*, *Gemidos de placer*, *Mil sexos tiene la noche* and *Lilian (la virgen pervertida)*. It migrates from the explicitly sexual into other realms too: the oneiric confusion that assails the heroine of *A Virgin among the Living Dead*; the grotesquely attenuated sea journey in *Countess Perverse*, the primordial spatio-temporal soup of *Devil Hunter*, the elastic temporal architecture of *Mansion of the Living Dead* and *Revenge in the House of Usher*.

Franco's approach to time is devoid of intellectual markers (no mentions of Bergson or Husserl or Heidegger, for instance, in *Succubus's* litany of references). It would seem that he arrived at it spontaneously, without conscious deliberation. But while it's instinctive, and mostly enigmatic, he maintained this play with time over many years so it was clearly something to which he felt artistically devoted. It seems counter-intuitive that Franco, working hell for leather, should create scene after scene of such paradoxical languor and luxuriant temporal suspension. Somehow, though, it works. In his 1975 film *Barbed Wire Dolls* he even makes a joke of it; a justly celebrated flashback sequence, showing a man (Franco) murdered by his daughter (Lina Romay) when he tries to rape her, sees the two of them hilariously mimicking slow motion in real time, while, inevitably, the various objects in the scene move according to standard durational gravity! Tucked away in this visual prank, however, is an apt précis of Franco's artistic project: violence and taboo eroticism in 'real-time slow motion'...





"How are you going to explain these phenomena?" he asked.  
 'Explain it? Has anyone ever explained anything except by paraphrasing  
 one set of words from another set?'"

August Strindberg, from *Inferno* (1912)

"I like it, but somehow it depresses me. The shapes are so hard."

"It's just a composition, a play of colours, nothing more."

Diana Lorys and Soledad Miranda discuss art before murder in  
*She Killed in Ecstasy* (1970)

"I was forced to fall back upon the unsatisfactory conclusion, that while,  
 beyond doubt, there are combinations of very simple natural objects which  
 have the power of thus affecting us, still the analysis of this power lies  
 among considerations beyond our depth. It was possible, I reflected, that  
 a mere different arrangement of the particulars of the scene, of the details  
 of the picture, would be sufficient to modify, or perhaps to annihilate its  
 capacity for sorrowful impression..."

Edgar Allan Poe; from *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839)

The best Franco films are extraordinarily difficult to 'explain'. There are no satisfactory answers to certain questions, like how a film as ramshackle and thematically confused as *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein* can possess some arcane voodoo that makes you watch it six, eight, ten times, or why a vastly 'overlong' twenty minute sequence in the horror-thriller *Al otro lado del espejo*, following a group of friends barhopping through Madeira, should ache with ineffable melancholy. I would stand up for the artistic worth of *A Virgin among the Living Dead* in a flash, but if someone asked me what it's 'about', what it 'has to say', what insights into the human condition it shares with us, I would struggle to offer a soundbite. There are questions about Franco's work that you could ask yourself forever, rolling them around and around in the mind, like a wine-taster eternally perplexed by a mysterious vintage. Is it cheating for a critic to say that it's probably this very indefinability that makes the films so special, so endlessly compulsive?

The pleasures to be found are so near to abstract that we must put aside conventional expectations. Franco's films draw close to the status of music, the most difficult of art-forms to 'explain'. Change a single note in a melody and you alter the very air it breathes (as for timbre, the possibilities are endless). In Franco's films, potent sensory and emotional effects are embedded in a delinquent spontaneity: verité elements, natural light, fleeting felicities, erratic framing, insolent or indifferent backgrounds. Chance events collude impossibly and things just 'feel right'. Shot for the most part on location, his cinema vibrates with the charmed accident of reality. 'Story' often disappears from the stage, usurped by the details of light on flesh, ellipses of editing, an emphasis on blurring and imprecision, and a willingness to sacrifice progression for an obsessive dwelling on the moment.

As we look chronologically through Franco's career, a narrative develops of ever increasing creative freedom, and ever decreasing finance. Franco's critics often maintain that the early films showed great promise, but he threw it all away for a mad dash through ever more cheap and sleazy productions. The temptation, in the face of this criticism, is to use the earlier films to 'validate' the later ones, but although gestures can be made in that direction, I think it's a mistake to go too far with it. I would rather not look at Franco's 1960s films and say that they somehow 'license' the 1970s work, as if he had to prove something before being allowed to go crazy. This is the sort of thing people say about Picasso, for instance: he was *such* a gifted draughtsman before he became a primitivist. Does the Picasso who painted 'Les Femmes d'Alger' have to prove himself at the easel painting conventional portraiture before we accept his great innovation? There's no doubt, as we watch films like *Rififi en la ciudad* and *The Awful Dr. Orlof*, that Franco is technically gifted. He can direct sequences for maximum impact, given the conventions of his era. But when he strikes out alone, in films like *Vampyros Lesbos*, *Nightmares Come at Night*, *Female Vampire* or *Lorna... the Exorcist*, such markers of quality are yesterday's news. Who cares about classical composition, or shot and counter-shot? Franco is intuitive, anarchic, unpredictable. He can dance to the occasional piper's tune, but when he really lets go he's moving to his own rhythm, conducting his own ritual. I'm willing to bet that in the foreground of his thoughts he simply wanted to run the camera, grab the shots, tilt the camera this way and that in search of surprise, tension, amusement, operating as he did so purely on instinct.

It's significant that after leaving the strong and charismatic producer Harry Alan Towers in 1970, Franco promptly restaged many of his Towers films as freer, less mediated projects. Thus, *Eugenie... the Story of her Journey into Perversion* became the genuinely Sadean *Eugenie*; *The Bloody Judge* became the delirious *The Demons*, *Count Dracula* was reconfigured as *Vampyros Lesbos* and *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein*. Once he'd tasted freedom, Franco was reluctant to relinquish it. Working for smaller production companies such as Eurociné and Comptoir Français du Film Production, he toed the line when it came to budgets but remained completely in control of the style of his films. This changed in the mid-to-late 1970s when he worked for Elite Films, run by another strong producer, Swiss director/entrepreneur Erwin C. Dietrich, who imposed conditions the like of which Franco had not experienced since the Towers period. Dietrich insisted that Franco should use Elite's cinematographers, editors and soundtrack composer, instead of doing it all himself, a requirement that brought greater discipline to Franco's filming style. He did however allow freedom of content, which is probably why many of Franco's films for Elite are so intensely sadistic; through sadism Franco makes his dart for freedom. (Dietrich's own films are scarcely ever sadistic, except for 1980's *Caged Women*, a delightfully sleazy retread of Franco's *Barbed Wire Dolls*).

The irony is that *total* freedom, which Franco enjoyed towards the end of his career, carried its own drawbacks. His search for greater and greater freedom was a one-way journey that led to video in place of celluloid, and eventually to shooting at home. In a way, a film like *Paula Paula* (2010) – filmed, I kid you not, in the director's own sitting room – is the ultimate Franco statement, yet it also shows the walls quite literally closing in. Freedom had become a drug for him, and he could no more work without it than a junkie could work without a fix.

Franco was intuitive, by will and by nature. Yet, to describe him as such is not to imply that he was merely groping in the dark. Intuition is the mind racing ahead, faster than words or theory, and if Franco committed technical 'crimes' in his haste he did so wilfully, daringly, wickedly, in full awareness of his transgression. Even as the films grew more and more delirious, he knew what he was doing; he *allowed* that delirium to occur. Thus, these wild and ramshackle films expand the range of cinema. A voracious cinéaste, an aesthete, a passionate lover of the arts, Jess Franco knew and understood more about how cinema works than 99% of his critics. With little or no money he pursued a boundless love of the medium, on his own recalcitrant terms, to the very end. Franco lived life as much as humanly possible through the lens, enmeshed in his own fantastical creations, a world of fear and desire. Making movies was all that mattered – with the exception of his beloved Lina Romay and a handful of his close friends, I doubt that he really gave a flying fuck about anything else. The Goya Award in 2009 was a well-intentioned gesture on the part of the selection committee, but Franco had already awarded himself the sweetest possible prize – a wild ride on the helter-skelter of his sixty year career. His lifetime award? To film until he dropped.

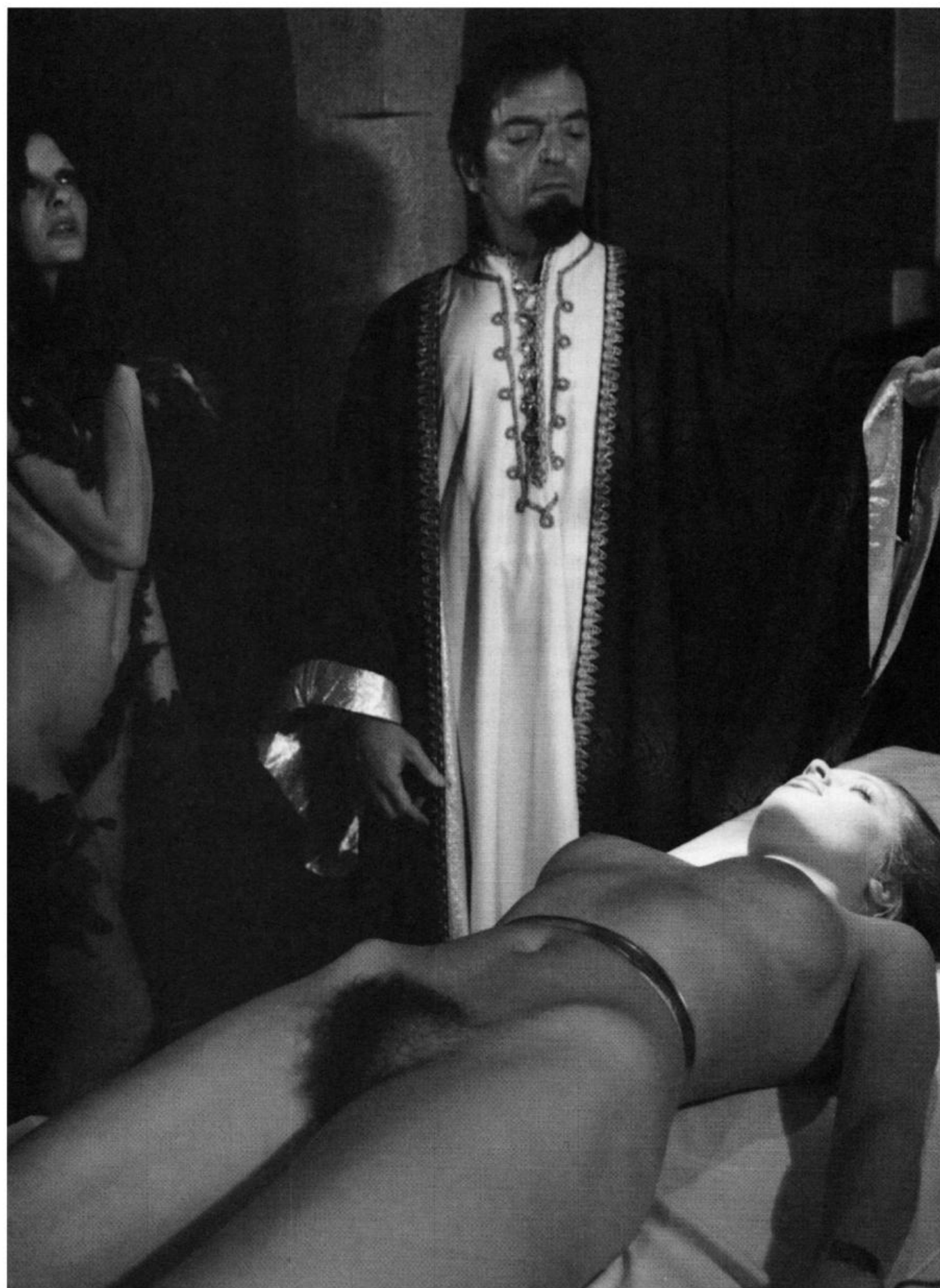
## Footnotes:

1. Reported in *El País*, 18 November 2008.
2. Enrique Franco Manera, born in Madrid in 1920, was one of the most prominent and respected intellectual figures in Spanish music. A pianist, composer, music critic, and founding member of the Grupo Nueva Música, he was described after his death on the 18th April 2009 as "the doyen of Spanish music criticism and one of the most relevant music thinkers of his time." by *ABC Madrid* (28 April 2009).
3. Dolores Franco would later marry Julián Marías (1914-2005), a Spanish philosopher associated with the 'Generation of '36' movement whose *History of Philosophy* (1941) is considered a major Spanish work on the subject. She died from cancer on 24 December 1977.
4. "ETC Jess Franco Special", 1996.
5. Franco is also credited as one of the music composers, alongside Manuel Parada and Isidro B. Maiztegui, although since both of these men were well-established soundtrack composers at the time and Franco was a novice working on his first movie it seems likely that this was a case of Franco providing a lyric for a song, or a single tune at most.
6. Interview by Álex Mendibil, 30 October 2009, published on the website 'Francomicon'.
7. Although released in Madrid on 14 January 1958, according to *ABC Madrid*, this was actually shot in 1957.
8. A handful of credits mentioned by Franco are unverified elsewhere: for instance, he claimed to have worked as production assistant on *Solomon and Sheba* (King Vidor, 1960), although his name does not appear onscreen. Alain Petit's invaluable resource *The Manacoa Files* lists

a further nine films on which Franco is said to have worked uncredited: *Señora ama* (1955 – assistant director and assistant producer), *Nosotros dos* (1955 – assistant director/assistant producer), *Educando a papá* (1954 – assistant director), *El expreso de Andalucía* (1956 – additional music), *El maestro* (1957 – additional music), *Un hecho violento* (1958 – additional music). In addition, Franco is said to have worked on Luis Saslavsky's *La corona negra*, a film originally made in 1951 for which new scenes were added by Saslavsky a few years later (exact date unknown); Franco is thought to have been assistant director on these scenes. He also stated that he worked as assistant to Andrew Marton, director of 2nd unit operations, on the 1963 Nicholas Ray film, *55 Days at Peking*. Although both *The Manacoa Files* and the IMDb claim Franco worked as assistant director on Juan Antonio Bardem's *Muerte de un ciclista* (1955) he does not appear in the onscreen credits, which list the assistant director as José Luis Monter.

9. <http://www.kane3.es/cine/jesus-franco-yo-creo-que-el-cine-debe-hacerse-con-todos-los-riesgos.php>
10. Note: there appears to have been no 'Estampas Guipuzcoanas No.1'; is the title simply an affectation, or a reference to an aborted first attempt?
11. <http://francomicon.wordpress.com/2008/09/24/estampas-guipuzcoanas-n%C2%BA-2/>
12. To Hans D. Furrer in the German *Vampir Magazine*, December 1976.
13. Often the real version was not shown to the censor, as Gerard Kikoïne explained: "All the scenes that were too strong, or that went on too long, were trimmed. Then if the film was too short, de Nesle – or any of those guys – cut in scenes from other films or shot some boring filler scenes. That was the version done for the censor. And then in the cinema they'd show the real hard version. Why? Because if it was rated 'X' they couldn't get the tax back." Gerard Kikoïne, interviewed for Mondo Macabro's DVD release of *Sinner: The Secret Diary of a Nymphomaniac*.
14. *The Lina Romay File*, Tim Greaves & Kevin Collins, 1-Shot Publications 1996.
15. Interview conducted by Paul-Hervé Mathis on 5 December 1976, published in *Ciné Girl* #12, France 1977.
16. Gérard Kikoïne, interviewed for Mondo Macabro's DVD release of *Sinner: The Secret Diary of a Nymphomaniac*.
17. *ibid.*
18. Some context may be useful here: Lord Longford was a Labour peer and campaigner on moral issues, best known, and deeply infamous, for his Christian forgiveness of 'Moors Murderer' Myra Hindley and his subsequent campaign for her release (Hindley later turned out to have duped him over her involvement in the killings). He earned himself the sobriquet 'Lord Porn' in the mid-1970s after he toured European sex cinemas on a 'fact-finding' mission in support of his abhorrence of the sex industry. He was also a bitter opponent of gay rights and backed Margaret Thatcher's anti-gay 'Section 28' legislation to the end. The Festival of Light was a conservative movement formed in the late 1960s by British Christians opposed to the so-called permissive society. Its most tenacious media campaigners were Mary Whitehouse and Malcolm Muggeridge, both of whom regularly appeared on television and in the newspapers (Muggeridge famously attacking *Monty Python's Life of Brian* for 'blasphemy', Whitehouse demanding that family sci-fi show *Doctor Who* be made less 'terrifying for tots').
19. "There is one man, completely anarchic, weird, uneven, odd, but very inventive: Amando de Ossorio. He is an old friend ... This is a fantastic man, one hundred percent." Interviewed by Alain Petit, 5 January 1974.
20. Interviewed by Lucas Balbo in 1986; published in *Obsession*, 1993.
21. From the essay "Lautreamont et Sade" published in 1949 by Les Editions de Minuit and reproduced in the 1965 Grove Press volume, *The Complete Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom and other writings*.
22. The name 'Bresson' does not occur in the English-language version.
23. From an interview with Jean-Luc Godard in *Cahiers du Cinema* 171, October 1965, reproduced in *Godard on Godard* (Da Capo Press) edited by Jean Narboni and Tom Milne.
24. *ibid.*
25. *ibid.*
26. Susan Sontag: writing on Ingmar Bergman's *Persona*.
27. Although he's actually called Fritz in the film! Ygor only turns up played by Bela Lugosi in *Son of Frankenstein* (1939) and *The Ghost of Frankenstein* (1942).
28. As always in Franco there's another thing to bear in mind: cost. Strip routines occupy screen time without gobbling up precious money. As spectacles go, a woman stripping off her clothes is a damn sight cheaper to arrange than a car crash, and just as likely to hold a male viewer's attention. This comes to a head in *La noche de los sexos abiertos* (1981) in which Lina Romay performs a lingering strip number draped over the bonnet of a classic American car, a scene which climaxes with Franco simulating a car crash with a zoom lens and a couple of sound effects!
29. Tourist destinations in Spain are the lifeblood of the Spanish economy, but Franco is one of the only directors to actually shoot in these despised places, 'tacky' holiday resorts like Benidorm or Torremolinos (as seen in *Las chicas del tanga*, *Camino solitario*, *Botas negras*, *látigo de cuero*, *Los blues de la calle Pop*, and *Sangre en mis zapatos*).





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# TENEMOS 18 AÑOS

*We Are 18*

Spain 1959

*Production companies*

**Auster Films S.L.** (Madrid)

credited on Spanish poster **Cibeles Films** (Madrid)

*Theatrical distributors*

**Filmax** (Madrid)

**Latina Films** (Seville)

*Timeline*

Shooting date	February	1959
Seville premiere	29 June	1961
Madrid	24 February	1967

*Theatrical running time*

Spain	78m
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**Cast:** **Isana Medel** (María José López Gómez-Urquiola). **Terele Pávez** (Pili, María José's cousin). **Antonio Ozores** (cousin Mariano/old woman/English car thief/Lord Marian/Lord Marian's son). **Luis Peña** (Luis Fernández Castro, bank robber). **Carmen Lozano** (Polly Paterson/Tripoli dancer/Lirio Blanco, Indian squaw). **Licia Calderón** (Piluca, Beltrán's girlfriend). **Javier García** (Beltrán, María José's boyfriend). **María Luisa Ponte** (María José's mother). **Antonio Giménez Escribano** (María José's father). **Pablo Sanz** (Castro, angry student). **Mercedes Alonso**. **Aníbal Vela** (teacher). **Juan José Vidal**. **Rufino Inglés** (Indian chief). **Emilia Rubio**. **Bárbara Orbis** with **Don Parker and His Jazz Orchestra** (themselves). *uncredited:* **Antonio Vela** (the young Lord Marian).

**Credits:** direction, story, screenplay and music: **Jess Franco**. additional dialogue: **Antonio Ozores**. director of photography: **Eloy Mella**. editor: **Juan María Pisón**. art director: **Eduardo Torre de la Fuente**. associate producer: **Luis García Berlanga**. production manager: **Carlos Grande**. music performed by **Don Parker and His Jazz Orchestra**; soloist and arranger: **Helmut Thiede**. piano solos and 'clave': **Jess Franco**. song "Hay quien dice de Jaén" by **J. Galindo**. assistant directors: **José Luis Barbero**, **Juan Estelrich**, **Luis Meiral**. unit managers: **José Perna**, **Pedro Escuder**, **Ángel Quintana**. camera assistants: **Aurelio Torres**, **Ramón Prestamero**, **Antonio Ibáñez**. make-up: **Adolfo Ponte**, **Manuela Ponte**. set construction: **Augusto Lega**. additional crew: **Horacio Rodríguez** [assistant art director], **Ángel Serrano** [assistant editor], **María Teresa Rodríguez**. wardrobe: **Wlady & Cornejo**. properties: **Vásquez**. colour: **Eastmancolor**. laboratory: **Madrid Film**. animated titles: **Estudios Moro**.

sound re-recording by **Estudios EXA**. sound supervisor: **Felipe Fernández**. music recorded on **Hispavox**. sound technician: **Víctor Suárez**.

**Synopsis:** *Madrid. María José López Gómez-Urquiola lives with her parents and Pili, her orphaned cousin. The two girls, both 18, share a room and are the best of friends. Their other cousin, Mariano, is a no-good scrounger adept at getting both girls to give him money. Persuading them that a trip to Andalucía would be a good idea, he sells them an ancient charabanc that's in danger of falling apart, charges them for hire of his tent and various household accoutrements, and the two girls set off on their journey. When the car breaks down they encounter an eccentric nun who offers to fix the vehicle. Jumping forward in time, we cut to María's room where we see her writing up the adventure, assisted by Pili's suggestions. They exaggerate the encounter with the nun to make her more sinister and bizarre. Cutting back to their travels, we see the girls lose their money: a swindler (who looks just like Mariano) drives off with it, leaving them with nothing. By chance, the girls later spot the car parked in a driveway. The female 'owner' claims her husband, a car dealer, brought it home. Tricking the woman, the two girls retrieve their vehicle. The storyline veers back and forth between fanciful depictions of their adventures and the girls' reminiscences about what really happened. An encounter with a bank robber, Luis Fernández Castro, ends with him shooting at María while chasing her along a beach. Fortunately a sentry at a local military encampment sees what's happening and shoots him dead. Later, they accept a lift from a mysterious masked man driving a horse-drawn buggy. At his castle, they discover he is 'Lord Marian', who has invited the girls to his abode because they remind him so much of his dead love, Polly Paterson, a young nightclub singer from London's Soho who he murdered after she drained him of his parents' allowance and then spurned his advances. A few years later, on the run in Tripoli, he strangled another woman. Finally, a third victim resisted death by throwing chlorine in Marian's face. Pulling off the mask, he shows the two girls his hideously scarred features (he looks a lot like Mariano). Lord Marian kills María but Pili pulls a gun on him and shoots him dead... Except that's not what really happened. Back in their bedroom the girls discuss the truth. The old man was just a drunkard, but essentially kind to them. Agreeing that they have gone too far in their joint efforts, they decide to tear up the story. Time passes and the two girls find love with their real-life suitors. Pili falls for a gloomy existentialist poseur. María settles down with a young man who says he has noticed a change in her since her trip to Andalucía. With his encouragement, she finally confronts the reality of her encounter with the bank-robber. Rather than simply a vicious criminal, he was a decent man trapped in a life of crime thanks to a nightmarish childhood where violence and death were commonplace. Discussing this sad tale with her new boyfriend, she agrees that it's time to start dealing with real life and to put aside childish fantasy; she throws the pages of her 'diary' away.*

**Production notes:** *Tenemos 18 años*, Franco's debut as director, starred Isana Medel (Franco's fiancée at the time) and Antonio





Ozores, a popular comedian who, although just turned 30, was already a veteran of around 35 Spanish films for directors like Juan Antonio Bardem, José María Forqué, León Klimovsky and José María Elorietta. According to the newspaper *ABC Madrid*, filming of *Tenemos 18 años* was under way in February 1959<sup>1</sup> (although the fact that Christmas decorations are displayed in the street in earlier scenes suggests the possibility of an earlier start, possibly December 1958 or January 1959). *Tenemos 18 años* was bankrolled by Auster Films, a company newly created by actor/writer/director Luis García Berlanga which had already supported Franco's short film *Estampas Guipúzcoanas No.2: Pío Baroja* (1958). As director, Berlanga's star was in the ascendant thanks to his well-received *Bienvenido Mister Marshall* (1953), about a rural Spanish village's attempts to woo money from the American post-war 'Marshall Plan'. Unfortunately, his venture into production foundered; *Tenemos 18 años* struggled to find distribution until two years later, when it premiered for just four days from Thursday 29 June to Sunday 2 July 1961, in Seville's Palacio Central cinema.

**Review:** "*It is midnight. The wind blows very strongly outside...*"

These are the first words spoken in a Jess Franco film, read from a private journal by a beautiful young girl. It soon becomes apparent that the text is more fantasy than reality; midnight scares will play a part in the film but *Tenemos 18 años* is essentially a comedy, with an eccentric freewheeling structure. It tells the picaresque story of two girls, María and Pili, who embark on a road trip together; their adventures, both humorous and exciting, are recounted to us in flashback via María's diary entries, although we soon realise she has a marked tendency to embroider the truth. The most striking aspect of the film is Franco's willingness to play games; the story involves layers of artifice and irony, unreliable narrators, fantasy presented as fact, pointing to the director's future obsession with the shifting sands of reality and illusion. Whether or not you engage with it will depend on your tolerance for broad humour of the sort that puts rollicking dance band numbers behind dialogue to indicate comic situations, but if you persist beyond the unpromising first reel you'll find a number of quirks and oddities, and a fair amount of inventiveness. Tonally, much of *Tenemos 18 años* is light and frivolous, yet there's a distinctly experimental approach throughout. "*This is my book, and I'll write it my way!*" says María, a statement of intent we can impute to Franco too. Modestly but unquestionably he is drawing attention to his storytelling procedure, and by extension himself. Ironic genre pastiches such as María's encounter with a 'ruthless' bank robber or the 'insane' Lord Marian are counterpointed or even contradicted later (the melodramatic story about the bank robber is shown again in realist mode, and the two girls abandon their horror yarn about the wicked Lord Marian because they agree he was actually very nice). Consequently we spend much of the film uncertain as to whether we're watching a true account of the girls' adventures, or having our leg pulled.

Antonio Ozores, first introduced to us as María's cousin Mariano, reappears several times playing swindlers, murderers and cheats; an example of the girls using someone they know as a template from which to invent variations. This treatment of Mariano takes on another dimension if we consider that Franco too is playing with his characters, arranging them like dolls, trying them out on the page, one minute as 'real people' and the next as genre cyphers. The way that Mariano turns up in different guises without the girls recognising him feels authentically dreamlike, and as we realise that María has been making up much of what we've seen, the unconscious comes into play; she repeatedly casts Antonio as a bad sort, so we can assume that she senses he's a negative force in her life (he's the type who sponges off friends while professing naivety, like Skimpole in Dickens's *Bleak House*). Thus María's creativity functions in the same way as a dream, drawing on the same unconscious storehouse of impressions and intuitions.

Although *Tenemos 18 años* is a gentle film, a bittersweet flavour predominates towards the end. Pili finds 'intellectual comradeship' with a 'serious' man, but in a cleverly written exchange we see that he's a poseur, dishonest about his feelings and lacking genuine maturity. María finds love with a man who encourages her to 'grow up' at the expense of her imaginative 'foolishness'; in other words, she falls for a rationalist dullard who fails to appreciate the value and significance of fantasy. As she embraces 'reality' with her man at her side it may seem like a happy ending, and it's played that way on the surface with María laughing as she throws the pages of her journal to the winds. But there's a worm in the apple of love. The ending feels melancholy, as if neither girl is likely to find true happiness. María in particular seems doomed to a life attending earnest social realist films with her ever-sensible husband, while pining for the fantastical dreams of her childhood. The approach here is reminiscent of Douglas Sirk, whose ironic Hollywood 'weepies' feign closure with deliberately hollow and unsatisfying 'happy endings'. Fortunately, Franco himself was not so easily dissuaded from the dreams and nightmares of the fantastique. These scattered pages from María's notebook landed like seeds in the fertile soil of his imagination, growing into the wild and wondrous monstrosities that await you in the rest of this book...

**Franco on screen:** Franco does not appear in the flesh, but his personality haunts the film; a fantasist who creates ghoulish tales, a man who can charm money from just about anyone he meets, and most of all, an unreliable narrator whose version of events can never be entirely trusted!

**Cast and crew:** Mariano's fantasy guises gave comic actor Antonio Ozores plentiful opportunity to display his skills. He had already appeared in more than thirty Spanish films, in supporting or minor roles, beginning with Edgar Neville's *El último caballo* ('The Last Horse' 1950). His first professional encounter with Franco was on Juan Antonio Bardem's *Felices pascuas* (1954) for which Franco was assistant director, and their acquaintance was revived two years later on León Klimovsky's *Viaje de novios* aka *Honeymoon* (1956). A

skilled improviser, he often made up comic routines on the fly, and indeed he receives a credit for 'additional dialogue' on Franco's film ... Director of photography Eloy Mella would go on to shoot Franco's *Vampiresas* 1930 and a handful of genre delights such as *The Invincible Gladiator* (1961), *Medusa Against the Son of Hercules* (1963) and *Death on a Rainy Day* (1967), the latter produced by future Franco collaborators Adrian Hoven and Pier Caminneci ... Head of Auster Films Luis García Berlanga remained sympathetic to Franco during his battles with the Spanish censor, not least because he shared his taste for risqué material. Berlanga edited and published a collection of erotic literature in 1977 called *La Sonrisa Vertical* ("The Vertical Smile") as well as awarding annual prizes for the best erotic novels published in Spain.<sup>2</sup>

**Music:** The inane comedy music by 'Don Parker and his Jazz Orchestra' is abandoned during Count Marian's 'flashback within a flashback' in which we see how he became a sociopathic killer; here the music consists of the innards of a piano being scraped and twanged, very much in the 'home-made avant-garde' style that would become the norm for many future Franco films, including of course *The Awful Dr. Orlof*. One suspects that Franco himself is tearing these sounds from the instrument.

**Locations:** Despeñaperros (a region of Jaén in Eastern Andalucía); the seaside resort town of Rota in the province of Cadiz; Doñana National Park and the nearby town of Sanlúcar de Barrameda; the Guadalquivir river in Seville (the girls' boat trip goes beneath the Puente de Triana), and Madrid. The interior of Lord Marian's castle looks suspiciously like the residence of a certain Dr. Orlof, whose acquaintance we shall soon be making...

**Studio:** Estudios Ballesteros, S.A. (Madrid).

**Connections:** Antonio Ozores' appearance in multiple roles is redolent of Alec Guinness in 1949's *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, a film Franco very much admired ... This being the first feature film in Franco's career, here's a brief list of things that will make multiple reappearances in later films: two beautiful female protagonists bonded by intimate friendship; numerous travelling shots from a car; action by the sea; gangsters and criminality; a woman performing onstage at a nightclub; a horribly scarred monster attacking young females; and most importantly, unreliability concerning the boundaries of fantasy and reality.

**Other versions:** To Franco's intense annoyance, the Spanish censor board interfered with his preferred cut of the film. In an interview published by Álex Mendibil in 2009 he described the videotape released in the 1980s, as "... a chopped off version. The original was ten minutes longer and has never been shown. The justification of the character of the fugitive, Luis Pena, was cut. With the cuts they gave me he looks like a gangster and a bastard, and he was not [...] And they also cut the final scene, which was more explicit, much clearer to the public."<sup>3</sup> (Fortunately, the vital scene with the gangster is intact in the Spanish DVD version, as is the ending.) Only one member of the official censorship board appreciated the film, Franco's friend José Luis Dibildos, with whom he had recently

co-written the comedy *Luna de Verano* (1959). Franco explained, "He defended it as best he could, but the ministerial establishment was ready to fuck me, so it was hopeless."<sup>4</sup> It was a taste of things to come: Franco would later suffer major problems with the Spanish censor.

**Problematica:** the following actors currently listed on IMDb are unconfirmed: Rafael Bardem, Baba Haruna and Adela Tauler (aka Ada Tauler). Note: Tauler appears prominently in two much later Franco films, *Love Camp* (1977) and *Voodoo Passion* (1977).

**Press coverage:** Seville's *ABC* newspaper commented, "Perhaps if carried off with more rhythm and less disjointed reiteration of its theme, the film would have been better. In general there is too much effort to sustain the lack of verisimilitude at all costs, and what could have been a gentle but distracted film becomes confused, losing all naturalness and grace in the process." However, the reviewer went on to acknowledge, "The part in which the aspiring novelists travel through Andalucía in an old automobile – keep in mind that all of this is a dream and nothing is real – is well executed, and supplies scenes of vitality and easy humor that are fun to watch, in which beautiful scenery captured with excellent colour photography provide the best moments of the film."<sup>5</sup>

## LABIOS ROJOS

*Red Lips*

### Spain 1960

*Alternative titles*

**Opération Lèvres rouges** (FR theatrical)

**Lèvres rouges**

*Production companies*

**Álamo Films** (Madrid)

**Cibeles Films** (Madrid)

*Theatrical distributors*

**Procines, S.A. [Producción Cinematográfica Española]** (Valencia)

**Latina Films** (Seville)

**Cibeles Films** (Madrid) [SP re-release]

**Les Films Hustaix** (Paris)

*Timeline*

Shooting date		1960
Announced to SP press	06 December	1960
Seville premiere	01 March	1963
French visa no. 27727 issued	14 June	1965
France	14 June	1965

*Theatrical running time*

Spain	97m
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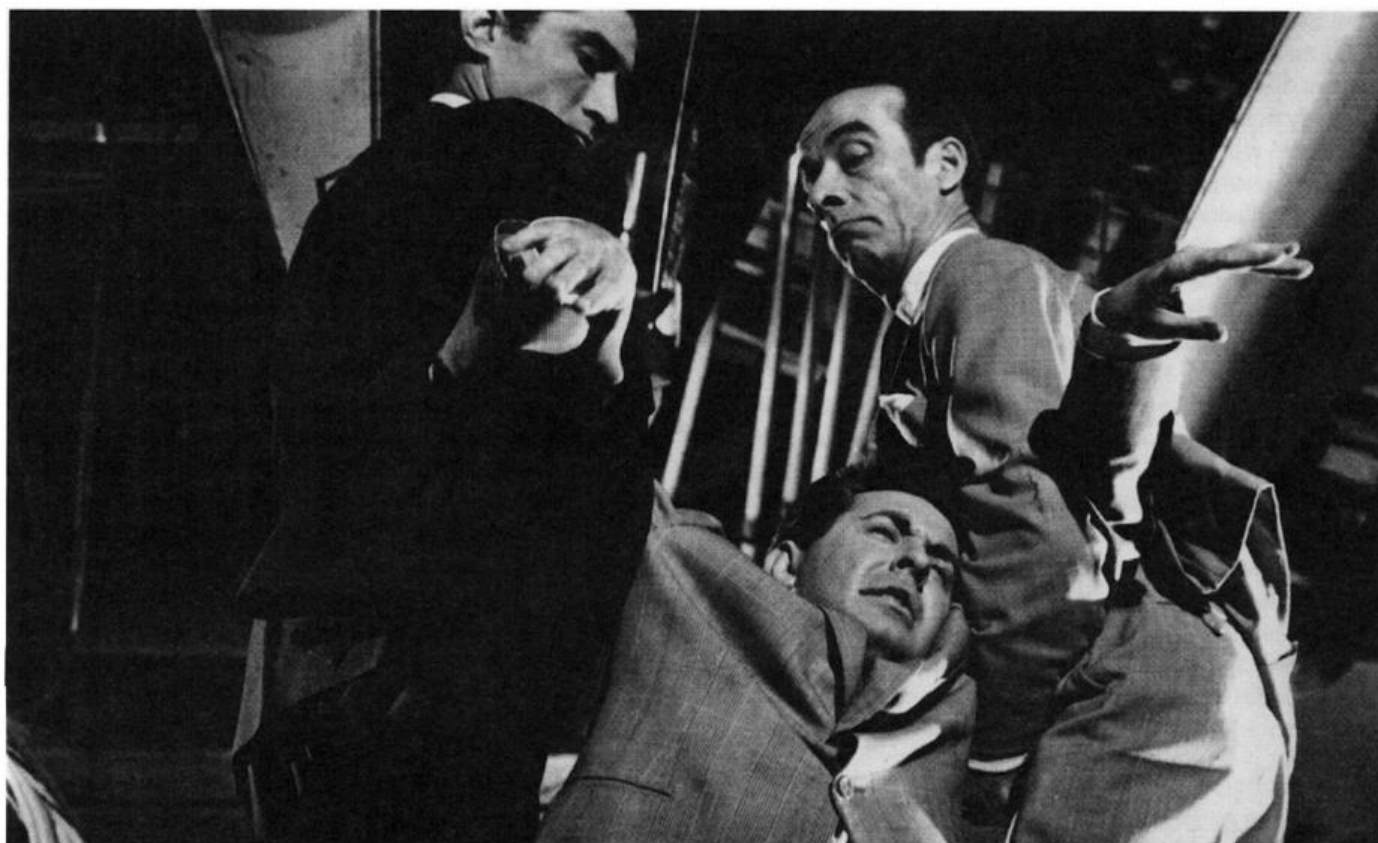




LES FILMS HUSTAIX *présentent*

## OPÉRATION LÈVRES ROUGES

UNE SÉLECTION PARIS-CANNES PRODUCTION



**Cast:** Isana Medel (Cristina). Javier Armet (Pablo, aka 'Radeck'). Lina Canalejas (Lina). Antonio Giménez Escribano (Alexis Kallman). Félix Dafaue (the fake Radeck). Nerón Rojas (Carlo Moroni). Ana Castor (Lola). Manolo Morán (Inspector Fernández). Venancio Muro (Carlos). Pablo Sanz (Kallman's younger henchman). Germán Vega (Kallman's older henchman). José Canalejas (Stardust club pianist). Enrique Júlvez. Guillermo Hidalgo (Kallman's chauffeur). Ricardo Meneses. Laureano Franco. Luis Meyral (Stardust bartender #2). José Morales (Stardust bartender #1). Berta Villasante. Mercedes Manera. Jaime de Pedro. Juan Antonio Soler (waiter with message from Kallman). Jerónimo Montoro (Foca, parrot-seller). Juan Cazalilla (Pablo, Stardust club owner-manager). J. Nerón Rojas. *uncredited:* José María Tasso (elevator operator). Jess Franco (offscreen voice calling for help).

**Credits:** director: Jess Franco. screenplay: Jess Franco and Manuel Pilares. directors of photography: Juan Mariné, Emilio Foriscot. editor: Antonio Gimeno. art director: Eduardo Torre de la Fuente. music: Antonio García Caño. songs: Jess Franco. producer: José María Monis. production manager: Ignacio Gutierrez. assistant production: Oscar Gómez de la Serna, Alberto Viñas. assistant directors: Enrique Vilaselma, Javier González. camera operator: Ricardo Andreu. camera assistant: Fernando Perrote. gaffer: Enrique de la Jara. still photography: [Miguel] Guzmán. orchestrations: Franco Grassi, Wess Wesley [sic]. assistant editors: Luis Álvarez, Enrique Agulló. wardrobe: Vargas y Ochagavía. tailoring: Cornejo. make-up: Adolfo Ponte, Manuela Ponte. properties: Vázquez y Mateos. sound re-recording: Artistas Reunidos. sound engineer: Plácido Colmenares. *FR poster adds:* music by 'Boyer'.

**Synopsis:** Madrid. Cristina and Lola, two pretty girls, run a detective agency called "Red Lips". They are hired by Kallman, a wealthy diamond collector, to retrieve a precious stone they are told has been stolen by a man called Radeck. Kallman's information indicates that Radeck is due to fly in to Madrid that day. The girls stake out the airport, but notice that as Radeck leaves he is being trailed by two men, Pablo and Fred. Cristina seduces Fred while Lola follows Radeck to a hotel, retrieving what she believes to be the stolen diamond but which is in fact a fake. Before leaving, she calls Inspector Fernández and tells him where to come to arrest the thief. However, Pablo, villainous manager of several shady nightclubs, arrives on the scene after Lola leaves, kills Radeck, and steals the real diamond. The police accuse the "Red Lips" girls of the crime. Commissioner Fernández, however, is not convinced and gives the girls ten days of freedom to provide evidence of their innocence and help arrest the culprit. Going undercover as singers in one of Pablo's nightclubs on the Costa Brava, they approach a mobster who immediately falls in love with Lola. Kallman arrives at the club, escorted by his secretary Moroni. Cristina and Lola use their powers of seduction to unmask Pablo, along with Kallman, who is actually a murderer, and save the reputation of their detective agency.

**Production notes:** With *Tenemos 18 años* languishing unreleased, Franco turned out scripts for two more Auster productions, *Llegaron los franceses* (1959), for which his co-writing credit was carelessly omitted from the credits, and *Ama Rosa* (1960). Both were directed by León Klimovsky. The opportunity for Franco to direct again came through the auspices of Álamo Films (who'd previously financed Franco's 1958 short film *El destierro del Cid*). But like a motor which stubbornly refuses to fire up, Franco's fortunes stalled again: *Labios rojos* fell foul of financial irregularities when Álamo failed to follow through on the deal, which led to the crew walking off the set in protest at unpaid wages.<sup>1</sup> Spanish distributor Cibeles Films stepped in to complete the film in return for distribution rights. Partly as a result of this, *Labios rojos* became the second Franco film to languish unreleased. It was announced to the press on 6 December 1960, through an advertisement placed by the obscure Seville-based distribution company Latina Films, who offered it, along with *Tenemos 18 años*, amid a ragbag of productions from Portugal (*Sangre torera* aka *Sangre Toureiro*), West Germany (*La Gestapo en acción* aka *Die feuerrote Baronesse*; *Romarei* aka *Romarei, das Mädchen mit den grünen Augen* by Harald Reinl), Brazil (*La flecha envenenada* by Rafael Baledón) and Spain (*Un mundo para mí* by José Antonio de la Loma).<sup>2</sup> Posters suggest that *Labios rojos* was re-released in Spain by Procines later in the 1960s. However, no one took the bait. It was to be another three years before *Labios rojos* would see the light of a Spanish projector...

**Review:** Essentially a light-hearted film, *Labios rojos* mixes frivolity with film noir to create an amusing but not entirely convincing cocktail. Our stars, the crime-fighting 'Red Lips' girls, are sweet and cheerful, the criminals they encounter less convincingly realised. Ultimately, Franco comes down on the side of fun, with the danger levels rather subdued. It certainly looks very striking: the cinematography by Juan Mariné is very much of a piece with later Franco crime films like *La muerte silba un blues* and the excellent *Rififi en la ciudad*. The set-up is agreeable too: the Red Lips girls are crime fighters who act outside the law but, rather like Sherlock Holmes, enjoy embarrassing the police with the results of their endeavours. For instance, in an early scene we see a man tied up to a tree with a note attached, declaring: "Good evening Inspector; I'm giving you Foca as a gift; he's responsible for cheating a female American millionaire..." In the cleverest conceit of the film, the girls present themselves as a single entity - 'Red Lips' - thus subverting expectations and protecting their true identities. (The idea would recur in *The Awful Dr. Orlof*, in which two killers are confused as one by police working from conflicting eye witness accounts.) The girls mask their identities by other more comedic means; for instance wearing clothes pegs on their noses and adopting squeaky voices. Soon, however, their games land them in trouble. Acting on behalf of a client they break into a man's room to retrieve what they think is a stolen diamond, only to discover later that someone entered the same room afterwards and killed

◀ Lola (Ana Castor) held hostage by 'Radeck' (Javier Armet); Kallman's henchmen (l-to-r Pablo Sanz and Germán Vega) abduct Radeck.

the 'thief'. Consequently they find themselves murder suspects, having left their boastful 'red lips' calling card to taunt the victim! In later chapters of the Red Lips saga (see Connections) the girls remain on top; here they are out of their depth. Wily Inspector Fernández doesn't really believe they killed anyone, but he uses the threat of a murder charge to manipulate them, making him the problem-solver and the girls his reluctant stooges; not a formula to which Franco would return!

The chief pleasures of *Labios rojos* are its stylish, sometimes clever photography and its bird's nest of double-dealing intrigue. Franco has fun with unusual camera angles (including a classic 'through a glass coffee-table' shot that should tickle anyone familiar with Mel Brook's *High Anxiety*) and plotwise he sends the viewer chasing narrative 'switcheroos' across treacherous shifting sands of information. Ultimately, though, neither the trickiness nor the noirishness are quite enough: *Labios rojos* may be busy and fleet-footed but it's too detached to really fly. What's lacking is that essential Franco ingredient, eroticism, making this a cute but slightly arid version of an idea done much better a few years later in the sexier *Sadisterotica* and the looper *Kiss Me Monster*.

**Cast and crew:** Isana Medel (playing Cristina) was Franco's fiancée at the time, having already starred in *Tenemos 18 años*; Franco was unhappy with her performance, which suggests a possible reason for their break-up soon afterwards ... Ana Castor (Lola) would turn up again in Franco's *The Sadistic Baron von Klaus* (1962) and *The Diabolical Dr. Z* (1965) ... Félix Dafaue later appears as a police inspector in *The Awful Dr. Orlof* (1961), and plays Colonel Mendoza in Franco's *El Llanero* (1963). He maintained a busy career in Spanish film and TV (including a supporting role in José María Elorrieta's witchcraft/time-travel comedy *A Witch without a Broom* in 1967 and a fleeting appearance in Lucio Fulci's 1969 Italo-Spanish co-production *One on Top of the Other*) right up until his death in 1990 at the age of 94 ... Antonio Giménez Escribano (*The Diabolical Dr. Z*'s sinister Dr. Zimmer) makes his first appearance for Franco; he played in many other Franco films of the 1960s, including *La reina del Tabarin*, *Vámpiras* 1930, *La muerte silba un blues*, *Rififi en la ciudad*, *Attack of the Robots* and *Golden Horn* ... *Labios rojos* was shot by Emilio Foriscot, a highly efficient professional in the 1960s who went on to shoot a pair of excellent thrillers for Italian giallo specialist Sergio Martino: *The Strange Vice of Mrs Wardh* (1970) and *The Case of the Scorpion's Tail* (1971). Evidently falling on hard times later in life, he fell in step with Paris-based Eurociné: after shooting their Nazisploitation film *Helltrain* aka *Love Train for SS* (1977) his last credit as cinematographer was a film sometimes misattributed to Jess Franco, Alain Deruelle's abysmal *Cannibal Terror* (1980).

**Music:** Antonio García Caño provided the score, with songs by Jess Franco, the Wes Wesley Band, and Franco Grassi. Caño is almost as obscure as the film itself, having scored only two other Spanish productions, one in 1949 and another in 1953, occupying himself mostly on musical theatre productions in Madrid.

**Locations:** Possibly the South of France, around Marseilles, which might explain the film's otherwise mysterious French production connections ( see 'Other versions').

**Studio:** Estudios Ballesteros, S.A. (Madrid, Spain).

**Connections:** *Labios rojos* introduces the 'Red Lips' girls, who would pop up again and again in Franco's *Sadisterotica*, *Kiss Me Monster*, *Les grandes emmerdeuses*, *Opalo de fuego*, and *La chica de los labios rojos* ... Antonio Giménez Escribano plays a villain called 'Kallman' (a name destined to recur at least four more times in Franco's filmography); Nerén Rojas plays a criminal called Moroni (the first of five); and Félix Dafaue plays the earliest of fifteen Franco characters called 'Radek' or 'Radeck' ... The plot, with its detective heroines blamed for a murder committed *after* they've vacated the building, will ring bells for anyone who's seen the 1972 crime thriller *Les Ébrablées* ... In pulp fiction the first hardboiled female detective duo sprang from the imagination of writer Cleve F. Adams. Violet McDade and Nevada Alvarado were two formidable females who debuted in a short story called 'Page Violet McDade!' published in *Clues Detective Stories* in 1935. As pulp fiction expert Kevin Burton Smith explains: "Violet was not some demure, addle-brained cheesecake ... A former circus fat lady, she weighed in at anywhere from 300 to 400 pounds, depending on whether she was dieting or not, and she was at least as tough as any of her male contemporaries, and often as morally flexible. Clever, cunning, greedy; a 'two-fisted Tugboat Annie' with an eye always out for a quick buck. Violet wasn't the least bit shy about using the twin guns she carried up her sleeves. And when she hit someone, man, he stayed hit."<sup>3</sup> The stories were narrated by Nevada Alvarado, a slim Mexican beauty who was likewise no push-over when it came to the rough stuff...

**Other versions:** Alain Petit, in *The Manacoa Files*, points out that although there is a French version of the film, it was never shown in a Parisian venue, and does not even appear in the otherwise very thorough 'General Film Analysis' documents produced by the Catholic Church. All that can be said about its French existence is that it was at least nominally available in 35mm or 16mm, as *Opération lèvres rouges*, appearing in film catalogues from distribution companies Hustaix (see stills) and RC (a Marseille-based company) in the second half of the sixties. A Belgian poster also exists, proving that the film was distributed there, although the producers are listed as Paris-Cannes – mysterious, given that the production was strictly Spanish. Note: Franco's film should not be confused with Damiano Damiani's *Il rossetto* (also 1960), which received a UK release as *Red Lips*.

**Press coverage:** Belated coverage from *ABC Andalucía* was fairly positive: "The adventures of two cheerful girls who become private detectives cause a series of amusing incidents, highlighted by the performance of Manolo Morán playing a police commissioner who, in his own way, shows as much efficiency as any Scotland Yard inspector, although it may not seem so ... the adventures, occasionally even choreographic in nature, in which the girls get involved, involve situations and scenes of intrigue and humour that at times successfully amuse."<sup>4</sup>



# LA REINA DEL TABARÍN

*The Queen of the Tabarin*

**Spain [& France] 1960**

Spanish depósito légal number: M.8216-1960

French visa number: 24439

## Alternative titles

**Mariquita La Belle de Tabarin** (FR theatrical)

**Mariquita** (FR CNC visa listing)

**La Belle de Tabarin** (FR theatrical re-release)

**La Mariquita** (FR alt theatrical - poster)

**Mariquita... De Schone Van Tabarin** (BEL poster)

## Production companies

**CIFESA Producción** (Valencia)

**Hispaner Films, S.A.** (Madrid)

French version adds: **Eurociné** (Paris)

## Theatrical distributors

**CIFESA** (Valencia)

**Eurociné** (Paris)

## Timeline

Shooting date		1960
Madrid premiere	14 November	1960
Seville	24 November	1960
Barcelona	21 August	1961
France	01 October	1961
French visa issued	02 November	1961
Belgium (Brussels)	13 April	1962
French re-release	12 November	1968

## Theatrical running times

Spain	100m
France	90m

*Note: The French video version (Go Video) bears the authentic onscreen title **Mariquita La Belle de Tabarin**. The Visa number onscreen is 37216 - however according to the CNC database this is the visa number for the French release of **Hells Angels '69** (1969).*

**Cast:** **Mikaela [Micaela Rodríguez Cuesta]** (Lolita, aka 'Lola Miranda'). **Yves Massard** (Roberto, aka Fernando de Alcantara). **Juan [Antonio] Riquelme** (Miguel). **Antonio Garisa** (Pepe, Lolita's guardian). **Danielle Godet** (Monique de Ségur). **Mauricio Lapeña** [as 'Mauricio de la Peña']. **Guadalupe Muñoz Sampedro** (Mercedes). **Julio Riscal** (Rodolphe's friend at café). **Alfredo Mayo** (Charles Lavant). **Dora Doll** (cabaret singer performing "Petite Tonkinoise"). **Ena Sedeño** (Fernando's

mother). **Antonio Giménez Escribano** (Professor Picardi). **Mary [Mari] Begoña**. **Ketty de la Cámara** (Manuela, Lolita's dresser). **Fernando Calzado** (Rodolpho). **Chelo Romero**. **Amalia Sánchez Ariño**. **José María Lado** (Basilio, Fernando's manservant). **Juan Cortés** (Arturo del Castillo, theatrical impresario). **José Riesgo** (2nd man with Cortés at audition). **María Hevia**. **Carmen Porcel** (white-haired lady with Fernando's mother). **Domingo Rivas**. **Celia Foster**. **Luis Rico** (announcer at Tabarin theatre). **Marita Castelló**. **Maruja Recio**. **Emilia Rubio**. **Lina Cristóbal**. **Francisco Bernal** (Joaquín, Arturo's carriage driver). **Antonio Pérez**. **Lorenzo Robledo**. **Antonio Padilla** (man with feet on table at audition). **Ángel Calero** (gatekeeper). **Mariano Berdalles**. **Plácido Sequeiros** (master of ceremonies). **Mary Yilix**. **Josefina Bravo**. **Fernando Salas**. **Sara Pelta**. **Ana Bertha**. **Rafael Ibáñez**. **Antonio Naranjo**. **Enrique Núñez**. **Manuel Velasco** [as 'Manuel García'] (Lola's brother). **Rafael Corés** (taverna owner). **Conchita Sarabia**. **Faustino Cornejo** (moustachioed man asking for waiter). **Amy Márquez**. **María Carmen Pastor**. **Carmen Pastor**. **Luis Meiral [Meyral]**. **Luis Domínguez Luna** (old man at bar waiting for drink). *uncredited:* **Soledad Miranda** (Brandenburg queen consort). **[Asunción] Muguet** and **[Miguel] Albaicín** (dancers).

*Credits:* director: **Jess Franco**. story: **María A. Spaltro**, **Ernesto Arancibia**. screenplay: **Luis Lucas Ojeda** & **José Gallardo**. dialogue: **Jess Franco**. French adaptation: **Geneviève Rhuis** [FR prints]. director of photography: **Antonio Macasoli**. editors: **Alfonso Santacana** [SP prints] / **Charles Nobel** [FR prints]. art director: **Tedy [Tadeo] Villalba**. background music & music direction: **José Pagán**, **Antonio Ramírez-Ángel**. executive producer & technical production supervisor: **Sergio Newman**. associate producer: **Marius Lesoeur** [FR prints]. production supervisor: **Angel Rossón**. production manager: **Gérardo Mendiburu**. production collaboration: **Manuel Iglesias**. presented by (Eurociné) **André Castillon**. 1st assistant director: **Alfredo Hurtado**. 2nd assistant director: **Fernando Quincoces**. continuity: **Isabel Campó**. camera operator: **Ricardo Andreu**. camera assistant: **Fernando Perrote**. still photography: **Joaquín Frutos**. "Tzigane" orchestra conducted by **A. Berki**. Ballet Español under the direction of Maestro Larrios. assistant editor: **Alicia Castillo**. settings & wardrobe: **María del Carmen Martínez Román**. assistant art director: **Arturo Villalba**. sets made by **Pina y López**. property master: **Antonio Soriano**. costume design: **Castro**. dressmaker: **María Teresa Iglesias**. seamstress: **Asunción Maroto**. make-up: **Manolita G. Ponte**. make-up assistant: **Maruja Sánchez**. hair stylist: **Rosario Vaquero**. Ballet French Can-Can under the direction of Mr. Schütte. properties: **Vázquez Hermanos**. costume house: **Loyzaga-Izquierdo**. jewellery: **Cortijo**. filmed in **PanorVision**. colour by **Eastmancolor**. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid, S.A.** [SP prints] / "Ciné-Photo" (Madrid) [FR prints]. prints: **G.T.C.**

(Paris) [FR prints]. colour timer: **Antonio Martínez**. sound recordist: **Antonio Capitán**. sound re-recording: **Fono España**. sound system: **Westrex Recording System**. Songs: “*Seguidillas di toma y dale*” traditional music, lyrics: **Antonio de Jaén**; “*La luna me engañó*” **Ricardo Fandiño, Francisco Gutiérrez Gil & Camilo Murillo**; “*Sandunga*” **Alvaro Retana, Luis Barta Galé**; “*Oye mi voz*” lyrics: **J. Solano**; “*Yo soy una nena*” lyrics: **Antonio Giménez Escribano**, music: **José Pagán & Antonio Giménez Escribano**; “*La Petite Tonkinoise*” music: **Vincent Scotto**, lyrics: **Georges Villard-Cristine**; “*Doña Mariquita*” **Jacinto Guerrero, Luis Fernández Ardavin**; “*Ojos Negros*” traditional music, lyrics: **Antonio de Jaén**; “*Háblame de Amor*” **Jean Lenoir**.

**Synopsis:** Madrid, 1913. Lola is a street dancer and singer who performs with her legal guardian Pepe on barrel organ, her friend Miguel on guitar, and her brother passing the plate. Eager to advance her singing career, Lola responds to an invitation from Arturo del Castillo, a theatrical impresario, but walks out when Castillo's associates treat her crudely. Deciding that she will promote herself, Lola sneaks into a masked ball being held at the home of the Marchioness de Alcantara, and presents herself as one of the entertainers. Her traditional song and dance number is greeted with enthusiastic applause. There she meets the roguish Fernando de Alcantara, son of the Marchioness, who is posing as one of the servants. A romance develops and, despite his prior philandering, Fernando falls in love. When the Marchioness hears of this she visits Lola, telling her of Fernando's true identity and his habitual womanising. Lola confronts Fernando, who declares his love and promises to visit Pepe the following day to ask for permission to marry. However, after being injured in a duel with a man called Rodolpho who impugned Lola's honour, he's unable to make the rendezvous. Lola assumes that Fernando's heart was not true, and soon after accepts an offer from French impresario Charles Levigne to sing in Paris. At last Lola achieves her dream, making her debut on the Paris stage at the legendary Tabarin Theatre. Fernando, now recovered enough to travel, learns of her celebrity and attends her debut show. Lola's performance is a huge success and marks the beginning of an illustrious career on the stage. With help from Miguel, Fernando convinces Lola that his love is genuine, and the two walk off into the dawn.

**Production notes:** With *Labio rojos* apparently following *Tenemos 18 años* into obscurity (a fate which can't have helped Franco's relationship with his girlfriend Isana Medel, who starred in both), a golden opportunity came with an offer from producer Sergio Newman to replace León Klimovsky as director of an upcoming musical, *La reina del Tabarin*. Shooting was due to start immediately, and Franco jumped at the chance. The film was designed to show off the talents of 'Mikaela' (Micaela Rodríguez Cuesta), a singer in the popular *cuplé* tradition (see 'Music' below). Inspiration came from the the Spanish *El último cuplé* (Juan de Orduña, 1957), an award-winning commercial smash about two lovers who sing *cuplés*, and the French *Tabarin* (Richard Pottier, 1958), concerning romantic intrigue in and around the eponymous French music-hall.

**Review:** A film that follows its central character from dust-streaked poverty to candy-coloured uptown opulence, *La reina del Tabarin* is an undemanding rags-to-riches story with a sweet centre. It features Andalusian singing sensation Mikaela as Lola, a poor Spanish girl with a marvellous voice who dreams of living the high life. In light of Jess Franco's later career it's something of an aberration, shot in a staid, bourgeois style that lacks many of the director's signature touches, but it's worth a look to see him helming a mainstream movie, and a musical at that, so early in his career. Intended to satisfy contemporary Spanish tastes for sentimental drama, *La reina del Tabarin* shows Franco to be a consummate professional, more than capable of fulfilling his brief.

Nothing in the handling of *La reina del Tabarin* transgresses the needs of the fairly conservative form it plays with; it's a brisk, colourfully efficient, ultimately impersonal work. The story is a gentle romp through poor-girl-strikes-it-big clichés – for instance, when Professor Picardi (Antonio Giménez Escribano) tries to educate streetwise Lola in conventional speech and manners, à la *Pygmalion*, we see her balancing books on her head and struggling to pronounce difficult vowel sounds. Lacking the avant-garde flourishes of *Tenemos 18 años* or the stylised noir chic of *Labios rojos*, the film relies heavily on dialogue to move things along. In future productions Franco would show a greater and greater aptitude for visual storytelling; in *La reina del Tabarin* he is forced to rely heavily on the story (by veteran writer/director Ernesto Arancibia) and the screenplay (by José Gallardo and Luis Lucas Ojeda).

But while *La reina del Tabarin* may be quite 'square', directorially speaking, there are a few sequences of interest here and there. Franco-watchers will relish the confrontation between Lola and a nosy female neighbour which turns into a cat-fight on the balcony outside their apartments, complete with blaring dissonant music. There's also a beautifully lit and strikingly composed scene in which reformed love-rat Fernando challenges the obnoxious Rodolpho (*The Awful Dr. Orlofs* Fernando Calzado Montés) to a duel: the camera observes the sombre, dawn-lit formalities through the wheel of a horse-drawn carriage. It's worth looking out, too, for Lola and Fernando's confrontation in a moonlit herbarium, in which Franco uses carefully composed perspective shots to emphasise the emotional distance between the characters. There's also a great moment when Rodolpho, drunk at a society party, throws wine at an ornate mirror in order to stare, high as a kite, at his rippling reflection. However, the most striking moment comes during Mikaela's performance of the song 'Ojos negros' in which Franco has the actress walk downstage and, out of frame, actually step onto the camera dolly. The camera then glides around the set with Mikaela singing in the foreground, as the background slides eerily behind her. It's a gorgeous 'trick shot' that would become increasingly popular in years to come (Scorsese used it in *Goodfellas*, Spike Lee used it in *Malcolm X*, and Gerald Kargl's outstanding 1983 film *Angst* adapted it for the Steadicam and used it for an entire movie). The technique *may* have been used before *La reina*



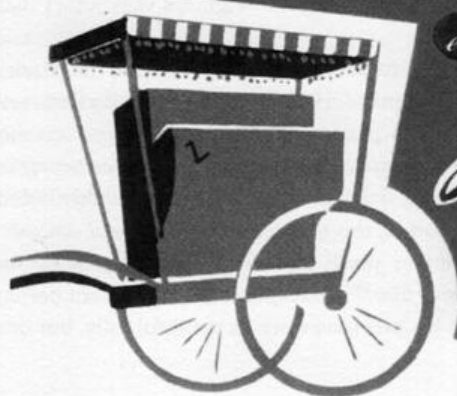
MIKAELA YVES  
MASSARD

JUAN ANTONIO  
RIQUELME GARISA

# La Reina del Tabarín

en EASTMANCOLOR

DIRECTOR:  
*Jesús Franco*





*del Tabarin* but I'm unable to think of an example. It's certainly very unusual, and shows Franco embracing the technical means at his disposal to elude naturalism and emphasise the delirium of performance, as the heroine is quite literally 'transported' by the camera. Such visual pleasures prove that Franco had not completely switched off his aesthetic ambition for the project.

For the most part, however, *La reina del Tabarin* is of limited interest. Dated and not exactly thrilling, it's basically a museum piece. However, as an industry calling card it impressed film financiers and therefore served its purpose. Establishing himself as a safe pair of hands, Franco created an excellent relationship with producer Sergio Newman, one that would eventually lead to the most significant project of his career...

**Cast and crew:** Playing Lola (not 'Mariquita', despite the French title), leading lady Mikaela (aka Micaela Rodríguez Cuesta) has undeniable screen presence. The central image of the film is of Lola advancing towards the camera while singing and dancing, holding the viewer's attention with her piercing eyes and radiant energy. It's actually quite a hard-edged performance: Lola is forceful, quick-tongued, unafraid of men, and her make-up accentuates the sharpness of her eyebrows and her angular cheekbones – it's a haughty face, just a shade short of cruel. She appeared again in Franco's next film, *Vampiresas 1930*, followed by Ricardo Blasco's prototype spaghetti western *Duello nel Texas* (1963) and the same director's *Le tre spade di Zorro* (1963). Ten years later, scenes from the latter popped up, in a distinctly less salubrious context, in the Eurociné softcore patchwork *Les Aventures galantes de Zorro* aka *Red Hot Zorro* (1972), alongside new material featuring future Franco regulars Alice Arno, Roger Danton and Evelyne Scott ... *La reina del Tabarin* sees the first appearance of an actress who would later shine dazzlingly in the firmament of Franco's cinema: Soledad Miranda, here with just a fleeting, non-speaking role as the Queen Consort of Brandenburg attending the Tabarin Theatre to see Lola's performance.

**Music:** Cuplés or 'couplets' are romantic Spanish songs derived from popular poems, which found their way into Spanish cinema via 'cuplé films'. *La reina del Tabarin*, Franco's only contribution to the subgenre, was bankrolled in response to Juan de Orduña's *El último cuplé* (1957), a massive Spanish hit which played the same theatres for a whole year.

**Locations:** The Théâtre des Variétés, seen in the film, is still in existence today on the Boulevard Montmartre, Paris. It featured prominently in Émile Zola's novel *Nana* (1880), as the place where the eponymous heroine achieves celebrity (Zola's story however, features an entirely more mercenary social climber). In 1907 the same theatre was host to the first feature-length European film, *L'Enfant prodigue*, directed by Michel Carré.

**Studio:** Estudios Ballesteros, S.A. (Madrid).

**Connections:** The French release (see 'Other versions') marks the beginning of Franco's longest business relationship, with Paris based producer Marius Lesoeur and his company Eurociné.

Lesoeur had recently pioneered the first French-Spanish co-productions with *La melodía misteriosa* (Juan Fortuny, 1956) and *Delincuentes* (Juan Fortuny, 1957) and was seeking new talent for future co-productions. He hit it off with Franco immediately and the two men forged a working relationship that would persist through the next three decades ... Notre Dame Cathedral pops up briefly; it would next resurface in Franco's cinema in a considerably less frivolous context, in the chilling slasher film *Sadist of Notre Dame* (1979) ... The film revolves around a key visual trope in Franco's cinema, the stage performance of a beautiful woman. It's an image that will reoccur in gradually more fevered and perverse contexts throughout his career.

**Other versions:** There are two strikingly different versions of the film; the original Spanish release, *La reina del Tabarin*, and the French cut, *Mariquita La Belle de Tabarin*. Most obviously, whilst the Spanish version is in colour, the French version plays in black and white. It also omits the first fifteen minutes of the original, losing an opening montage of Madrid street scenes, a sequence showing Lola singing and dancing for passers-by, and the establishing scenes at the heroine's home. It begins instead with a shot of the Théâtre des Variétés in Paris (not seen until much later in the Spanish version) after which we jump forward to spy on the philandering Fernando, who leaves one paramour swooning in a horse drawn carriage while he jumps out and exchanges passionate kisses with another. By cutting back Lola's backstory the French version makes Fernando the initial focus, a decision no doubt intended to exploit the casting of Yves Massard, who was a familiar face in French films at the time. (Franco is likely to have noticed Massard in his friend Juan Antonio Bardem's 1956 film *Calle mayor*.) But while it may have made commercial sense, in filmmaking terms the decision is flawed; after thirty minutes Fernando largely disappears from the film and instead we concentrate on Lola's journey through the Parisian social scene. The changes also prioritise the high life in Paris over working class life in Madrid, and deny the heroine an introductory social context for her aspirations. To complicate matters, the French version features an extra scene *not* included in the Spanish original: it occurs after Lola's disastrous attempt to entertain upper-class Fernando at her ramshackle lodgings, and sees Fernando leave in anger. Finally, the French cut ends with Lola and Fernando walking silently from the theatre, arm in arm into the Parisian dawn, omitting the original's valedictory dialogue in praise of Spain.

**Press coverage:** *La reina del Tabarin* premiered in Madrid on Monday the 14 November 1960, to generally excellent reviews. Franco's direction was praised for being "proficient, accurate and also expressive. The atmosphere is right and the composition of images, as well as their rhythm, is felicitous."<sup>21</sup> The reviewer also noted that Franco had "has waived, this time around, professional concerns more in tune with his restless youth, and directs according to the familiar mould for this genre of film."<sup>22</sup> A backhanded compliment perhaps, as it seeks to dismiss his previous work as youthful folly, but one that

put its finger on an emerging aspect of Franco's talent; an ability to tailor his style to suit the demands of a variety of subjects.

Thanks to excellent business in Madrid, *La reina del Tabarín* was then distributed around the rest of Spain. It got a bumpier reception at the Seville-based *ABC Andalucía* whose reviewer complained that "the dialogue's vulgarity and poverty of wit is almost horrifying", before adding, "Jesús Franco, who directed the film, has not done much to improve the poor quality of the script."<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile in Barcelona, *El Mundo Deportivo* (chiefly a sports and entertainment newspaper) ran a rapturous review extolling the celestial virtues of the film's rising star: "A radiant beauty, with wonderful temperament and style as singer and dancer, sensitive and expressive as a comedic actress, Mikaela is, in her genre, the most interesting revelation we have seen in the Spanish film musical in recent times. Successful on the international stage long before the Spanish, she has come to prevail also in the movies, and *La reina del Tabarín*, produced by Hispamer-Cifesa, and directed by Jesús Franco, represents her consecration as a screen star."<sup>4</sup>

## VAMPIRESAS 1930 (VOLANDO HACIA LA FAMA)

*Gold Diggers of 1930 (Flying towards Fame)*

### Spain [& France] 1960

Spanish depósito légal number: M.13175-1960

French visa number: 27397

#### Alternative title

**Certains les préfèrent noires** (FR theatrical) *Some Like it Black*

#### Production companies

**Hispamer Films** (Madrid)

**CIFESA Producción** (Valencia)

French version adds: **Eurociné** (Paris)

#### Theatrical distributors

Spain	<b>CIFESA</b> (Valencia)
France	<b>Eurociné</b> (Paris)

#### Timeline

Shooting date	between Dec 1960 and Feb	1961
Seville premiere	29 September	1961
Madrid	08 March	1962
Barcelona	02 July	1962
French Visa issued	04 September	1963

#### Theatrical running time

Spain	105m
France	106m

**Cast:** **Mikaela** [**Micaela Rodríguez Cuesta**] (Dora). **Antonio Ozores** (Daniel Masset). **Yves Massard** (Tony Fabien). **Lina Morgan** (Carolina Malotte). **Antonio Garisa** (Odón, Dora's publicity manager). **Juan** [**Antonio**] **Riquelme** (Oscar, musical agent in Nice). **Trini Alonso** (Lida), **Manuel Alexandre** (film director). **Antonio Giménez Escribano** (Carlo). **Silvia Solar** (journalist wearing tie). **Fernando Calzado** (Radeck, a counterfeiter). **Félix Fernández** (the producer). **Mari Begoña** (Rita). **José María Labernié** (Fernando). **Terele Pávez** [as 'Mari Tere Penella'] (journalist in green hat). **Valeriano Andrés** (lead counterfeiter). **José Morales** (Berthier, theatrical agent). **Javier** [de] **Rivera** (studio boss). **Pablo Sanz** (dark-haired gunman). **Guillermo Hidalgo** (flautist). **Luis Rico** (counterfeiter with widow's peak). **Antonio Pérez**. **Ketty de la Cámara** (large dancing lady). **Francisco Bernal** (hatted photographer). **Conchita Sarabia**. **Rafael Corés** (crew member in red scarf). **Carlos Calvo**. **Juan Cortés** (police inspector's colleague). **Tota Alba** (woman trying to enter telephone booth). **Juan Antonio Arévalo** (saxophonist). **José Carlos Arévalo**. **Lolita del Pino**. **Vicente Haro** (sarcastic waiter). **Pedro José Rodríguez**. **Mary Sol** [**Marisol**] **Ayuso**. **Manuel San Francisco**. **Lina Cristóbal**. **Diego Larrios**. **Rafael Ibáñez**. **Juan López-Brea**. **Amy Márquez**. *uncredited:* **Miguel del Castillo** (police inspector). **Plácido Sequeiros** (man in suit in nightclub). **Elena María Tejeiro** (woman with wealthy older man at nightclub). **Ángel Calero** (chef).

**Credits:** director: **Jess Franco**. story: **María del Carmen Martínez Román**, **Pío Ballesteros**. adaptation & dialogue: **Jess Franco**. additional dialogue: **Antonio Ozores**. director of photography: **Eloy Mella**. editor: **Alfonso Santacana**. art director: **José Alguero**. background music & musical direction: **José Pagán**, **Antonio Ramírez-Ángel**. executive producer & technical production supervisor: **Sergio Newman**. production supervisor: **Ángel Rossón**. production manager: **Jorge Román**. assistant production: **Miguel Asensio**. assistant director: **Rafael Romero Marchent**. continuity: **Isabel Campo**. camera operator: **Ricardo Poblete**. camera assistant: **Fernando Perrote**. still photography: **Miguel Guzmán**. music performed by **Tete Montoliu** of the **W. [Whisky] Jazz-Club y su gran orquesta**. orchestrations: **Molina y Guitián**. assistant editor: **Alicia Castillo**. settings & wardrobe supervisor: **María del Carmen Martínez Román**. assistant art director: **Jaime Cubero**. set construction: **Augusto Lega**. property master: **Martín Sacristán**. special wardrobe: **Pilar Diez**. seamstresses: **Esperanza Sierra**, **María Moya**. make-up: **Manolita G. Ponte**. hair stylist: **María Luisa del Campo**. props: **Luna**. wardrobe: **Izquierdo**. jewellery: **Cortijo**. musical instruments donated by "Garijo" (Madrid). filmed in **PanorVision**. colour: **Eastmancolor**. laboratory: **Madrid Film**. sound re-recording: **Fono España** (Madrid). sound system: **Westrex Recording System** (technician: **Antonio**

**Capitán**). music & songs recording: **R.C.A. Española** (recordingist: **José María Batlle**). Songs: “*Tu mano en mi mano*”, “*Boum*”, “*El mar*”, “*Tu que pasas sin mirar*”, “*Menilmontant*” by **Charles Trenet**, published by **Raoul Breton** (Paris). Spanish songs by **Fernando García Morcillo** “*Viajera*” lyrics by **Francisco del Val**; “*Santa Cruz*” lyrics by **Adolfo M. Pinto**; “*Recordar*” by **Charles Borel-Clerc**, **José Luis Salado**, **Saint Granier** [**Jean Granier de Cassagnac**]; “*Santa Lucía*” music: **traditional**, lyrics by **Jess Franco**; “*Sueño de amor*” by **Franz Liszt**; “*Lara-Lara*” by **Jess Franco**. *uncredited*: French co-producer: **Marius Lesoeur**.

**Synopsis:** *France 1930. Daniel Masset and Tony Fabien, two friends who work as musicians and occasional stuntmen in the movie industry, meet and befriend Carolina Malotte, who is poor, unemployed and starving. Carolina is a musician too, so they invite her to stay with them at an apartment block for struggling artists. Tony falls for Dora, a glamorous actress currently shooting a silent vampire film. Thanks to his penchant for playing the violin to soothe her nerves, she falls for him too. Dora's finagling manager decides that the love affair will help boost his client's public profile, and installs photographers and gossip-column journalists in Dora's boudoir prior to Tony's arrival for a date. Despite initially blaming Dora, Tony forgives her and the two become an item. Just as their careers are taking off, talking pictures arrive. Tony, Dora, Daniel and Carolina find their work options dwindling. One day, as they bemoan their circumstances in a Parisian park, they find banknotes blowing in the breeze. Joyfully collecting them up and deciding this is the windfall they need to turn their luck around, they fail to see that the money has spilled from the pockets of a dead man, Moroni, concealed in nearby bushes. The notes are counterfeit, and when a policeman sees the four friends leaving the scene he raises the alarm. They are now suspected of murder. In need of a hiding place, they spot a visiting American jazz band who are waiting for a train to the South of France and trick them into boarding a train to Siberia. The four then take their place and head for their booking in Nice. However, the band were all black; the four friends must therefore 'black up' to pull off the deception. Unbeknownst to them, the counterfeiters who killed Moroni - headed by Radeck and his tough-as-nails wife Lida - operate from the same venue. Dora stumbles into the basement printing workshop and discovers the truth, but is rescued by Daniel. Fortunately the police have been tracking the four friends and arrive at the theatre. Radeck and his wife are arrested and the friends' onstage performance receives rapturous applause.*

**Production notes:** The fruits of *La reina del Tabarin*'s success were not slow in coming. Franco's next project, *Vampiresas 1930*, was already in preparation when Mikaela attended *Tabarin*'s Seville premiere on 24 November 1960.<sup>1</sup> Commencement of shooting is hard to pin down accurately, but by February 1961 Franco was definitely back behind the camera,<sup>2</sup> and production was sufficiently advanced by 4 March 1961 for CIFESA to announce the movie as forthcoming later in the year.<sup>3</sup> The film itself bears a Depósito Legal number dated 1960: this may indicate when the film first

went into pre-production, with the producers eager to have the film included in the 1960 Spanish film yearbook.

**Review:** *Vampiresas 1930*, set in Paris on the cusp of a new era, between the Golden Age of silent cinema and the arrival of the 'talkies', is frequently referred to by Franco admirers as a clever homage to American musicals and screwball comedies. It's either that, or it's a rip-off so blatant that even someone like myself, who can't stand Hollywood musicals, can spot the felony. Bolting together ideas from two well-known sources (*Singin' in the Rain* and *Some Like it Hot*), *Vampiresas 1930* is certainly cheeky. Ultimately, however, it's too clumsy in construction, neither escaping the shadow of its sources nor blending them into a satisfying new combination. Instead it simply changes (stolen) horses midstream, leaping from Stanley Donen's dawn-of-the talkies musical to Billy Wilder's classic comedy.

The first thing that needs to be cleared up is that despite the title, or the appearance of a spooky cape-clad Mikaela creeping through a window at the start of the film, *Vampiresas 1930* has nothing to do with horror. The title actually translates as 'Gold Diggers of 1930', the 'vampires' of the title being merely counterfeiters, and on a gentler note, hungry artists grabbing at the chance to make some dough in lean times. The title (along with elements of the story) is drawn from the Mervyn LeRoy and Busby Berkeley musical *Gold Diggers of 1933* (1933), about a group of struggling actors and playwrights during the American Depression. The opening scene, with Mikaela climbing through a window to kill a sleeping male with a knife, turns out to be a film-within-a-film pastiche of Louis Feuillade's silent serial *Les Vampires* (1915-1916), itself a rather misleadingly titled project, being more concerned with crime (and a pre-*Dr. Mabuse* mastermind) than the fanged horrors one might have expected. It's interesting, nonetheless, to note that Franco is once again flirting, however casually, with horror imagery: first the maniacal murderer Lord Marian in the comedic *Tenemos 18 años*, and now this.

The opening section, with its comic depiction of life on a movie set, shows Franco already very confident with spoofing film genres, and indeed cinema itself. Evidently, having observed the petty absurdities of the industry while working as an assistant director in the 1950s, Franco squirreled away his impressions and then drew upon them here. Perhaps the most amusing scene is one in which Dora and her unscrupulous agent invite newspaper photographers and celebrity gossip-columnists (including a young Silvia Solar) to hide in Dora's apartment and take pictures of her in the arms of her new lover, Daniel, to be used in promotional 'scandal' coverage. Dora and Daniel canoodle while a photographer's magnesium flashgun goes off like an explosion in a firework factory. It's a farcical gag of course, and we're not really supposed to believe that Daniel would be so oblivious. But we play along, and the scene doubles as a metaphor for the way the cinema manipulates our emotions; we know it's all a big put-on, with lights and cameras and men tucked away behind furniture brandishing unwieldy



technology, but we allow ourselves to be seduced into ignoring the truth. With this amusing sight gag, Franco suggests that cinema is as powerful a seductive device as a kiss from a beautiful woman.

Yet aside from such playfulness there's very little plot to go round, with ten musical numbers making up more than a quarter of the running time and much of the rest cribbed directly from the aforementioned sources. For all of its genre knowingness, for all the movie buff quotations and cheeky magpie attitude, there's something missing here that makes me glad that Franco didn't persist with the genre. While I'm loathe to dismiss a film seen without subtitles or English dialogue (the French soundtrack, which would have helped, is now lost) I have to admit that *Vampiresas 1930*, though clearly a work of some wit, left me cold in a way that even the shallow spectacle of *La reina del Tabarin* did not.

**Cast and crew:** Ported over from *La reina del Tabarin* were Mikaela, Yves Massard, Juan Riquelme, Antonio Garisa and Antonio Giménez Escribano, while comedian Antonio Ozores returned from *Tenemos 18 años*. Ozores had recently married actress Elisa Montés (in May 1960); the latter would go on to appear in Franco's *99 Women*, *The Girl from Rio* and *El muerto hace las maletas* ... Co-writer Pío Ballesteros would later collaborate on Franco's *The Sadistic Baron von Klaus* in 1962.

**Music:** Franco presents a selection of songs by industry giant Charles Trenet, including a rendition of his most famous tune 'La mer' (later reworked by Bobby Darin into the hit single 'Beyond the Sea'). 'Lara Lara', a song during a scene in which Lida is approached by Radeck about forty minutes into the film, would later play a key role in the narrative of *La muerte silba un blues* (1962), where it reappeared under the name 'Blues Tejado'.

**Locations:** Much of the location work is shot in the streets of Paris, and on the banks of the Seine. The credits roll over the ritzy lights of the Pigalle district. When the action moves to Nice in the South of France, Franco shoots at the city's beautiful Hotel Negresco, the seafront facade of which, glowing with neon in evocative night time shots, remains the same more than fifty years later.

**Studio:** Estudios Ballesteros, S.A. (Madrid).

**Connections:** Is *Vampiresas 1930* a case of plagiarism, or homage? You be the judge. The plot of Stanley Donen's *Singin' in the Rain* features Gene Kelly as a popular silent film star - a singer, dancer and stunt man - embroiled in an artificially arranged affair with a Hollywood actress. *Vampiresas 1930* splits the Gene Kelly character into two roles, Tony and Daniel, and reduces their professional and social standing (either because Franco preferred poorer characters or because the life of a poverty-stricken musician costs less to put up on the screen than the life of a major movie star). Franco softens the female lead (in *Singin' in the Rain* a shallow, selfish starlet played by Jean Hagen), but retains the notion of the film studio exploiting her romantic connections to increase her popularity. A major plot development in *Singin' in the Rain* concerns the studio system being thrown into turmoil by the arrival of the talkies; specifically *The Jazz Singer* (1927). *Vampiresas 1930* not only copies this

idea, it stages its own jazz-themed talkie. However, Franco chose not to 'borrow' the denouement of *Singin' in the Rain*, involving Gene Kelly's girlfriend lip-syncing for the exploitative Jean Hagen character; perhaps this detail, with its jibe at inauthenticity, would have been a little too ironic? Critics have been kind in asserting that the film is an affectionate homage to classic Hollywood. *Singin' in the Rain* was made in 1952 and released in Spain in 1953; that's only eight years earlier than *Vampiresas 1930*. The pilfering of a major plot idea from Billy Wilder's *Some Like it Hot* (the heroes posing as a female jazz band to avoid detection) is even more brazen; Franco must have seen the film in France (where it was released in 1959) on one of his frequent visits. The fact that it didn't secure a release in conservative Spain until 1963 meant that he could actually steal a march on Wilder, at least in the eyes of Spanish viewers! (The racial twist on *Some Like it Hot* is also quite tasteless: the heroes 'black up' to pose as African-American jazz musicians, while diverting the unfortunate 'negroes' on a train to Siberia.) It seems to me that these 'homages' are basically just acts of shameless theft, commercial ideas nicked from the popular Hollywood films of the day, rather as Italian horror films of the 1970s and 1980s ransacked American hits for their plot devices. The only element that could reasonably be called an homage to an earlier form of cinema is the film-within-a-film starring Mikaela; an affectionate and beautifully stylised evocation of Louis Feuillade's 10-part silent film serial *Les Vampires* (1915-1916) which featured a fetishistically attired female cat-burglar called 'Irma Vep' (an anagram of 'vampire') terrorising rich old fools in turn-of-the-century Paris. (French director Georges Franju was also a fan of Feuillade, deriving the title of his classic *Les Yeux sans visage* from a Feuillade short, and directing a remake of Feuillade's 1916 masked avenger tale *Judex* in 1963, a fact worth bearing in mind when considering the genesis of Franco's next film, *The Awful Dr. Orlof*). Incidentally, Feuillade himself directed something in the region of seven hundred films (including, of course, many one-reelers) in his twenty year career, making even Franco look like a slacker ... Mikaela sports a spider-woman dress that anticipates the imagery of *The Diabolical Dr. Z*, while Lina Morgan (now a major Spanish TV star) performs the very first striptease in a Franco film. Well almost a striptease - she only takes off her sweater ... The counterfeiters are headed by a married couple called the Radecks, a villainous surname recurring from *Labios rojos* ... At one point we see Lida Radeck menacing the bound Mikaela with a large cutlass, a quasi-comical image of menace to which Franco would return in *Midnight Party* (1975) and *Ópalo de fuego* (1978) ... The film title references two classic Busby Berkeley musicals, *Gold Diggers of 1933* (1933) and *Gold-Diggers of 1935* (1935), which in Spain were called *Vampiresas 1933* and *Vampiresas 1935* respectively.

**Other versions:** An export version, released in the South of France, did the rounds as *Certains les preferent noires* ('Some like it black'), a title that may be outrageous but at least has the virtue of confessing where half the film's inspiration came from.

**Press coverage:** Reviewed in the Seville edition of *ABC*, *Vampiresas* 1930 was judged to be "Not bad as a satire of the emergence of sound film, and therefore the decline or total eclipse of the silent movie".<sup>4</sup> Once again Mikaela was praised ("[Her] songs highlight the undoubted skills of this outstanding artist"), although pacing was regarded as "sluggish at times, though the narrative becomes more agile towards the end".<sup>5</sup> The film opened in Madrid in March 1962 to mixed reviews. "We do not deny that it will often make you laugh quite heartily", conceded one reviewer, before noting that the film "seems to parody a parody of another parody".<sup>6</sup> Another stated that the film "Must be accepted as a movie without pretensions" but complained that it "gives the impression of a filmed variety show".<sup>7</sup> However, not everyone was so critical: "The days of silent cinema, with their problems, their famous stars, the sentimental atmosphere of which makes us laugh perhaps, today, but which is full of melancholy for many, with their vamps and artists eager for fame when not dying of hunger, were deliciously evoked in the wonderful comedy, *Vampiresas* 1930, a comedy paved with exhilarating, hilarious situations ... It's also a set of musical numbers, an evocation of forgotten music with perfectly adequate new songs and rhythms."<sup>8</sup>

#### Theatrical distributors

**Delta Films, S.A.** (Madrid)  
**D.C.F.** (Paris); **Europrodís** (Marseille)  
**Grand National Pictures Ltd** (London)  
**Sigma III Corp.** (California)  
**World Entertainment Corp.** (US 1968 re-release)

#### Timeline

Shooting date	October-November	1961
Barcelona premiere	09 March	1962
Madrid	14 May	1962
French visa issued	12 September	1962
France	01 October	1962
Seville	30 November	1962
Italy (Rome)	10 August	1963
UK 'X' certificate issued	12 November	1963
US premiere (Cincinnati)	07 October	1964

#### Theatrical running time

Spain	93m
France	88m
UK	86m08s
USA	90m

## THE AWFUL DR. ORLOF

**Spain, USA [& France] 1961**

Spanish depósito légal number: M.11910-1961

French visa number: 25668

*Original theatrical title in country of origin*

**Gritos en la noche** (SP) *Screams in the Night*

**L'Horrible Docteur Orlof** (FR theatrical)

*Alternative titles*

**L'Horrible Dr. Orlof** (FR theatrical poster)

**The Demon Doctor** (UK theatrical)

**Il diabolico Dottor Satana** (IT theatrical)

**Il diabolico Dott. Satana** (IT theatrical locandina)

**El Doctor Demonio** (MEX theatrical)

**El Horrible Dr. Orloff** (ARG theatrical)

**L'horrible Dorlof de afschuwelijke** (NL theatrical poster)

**The Diabolical Doctor Satan** (UK video)

**O Terrível Dr. Orloff** (POR DVD)

**Dr. Orloff** (BBFC admission sheet)

**The Horrible Dr. Orlof** (BBFC admission sheet)

*Production companies*

**Hispamer Films** (Madrid)

**Ydex, Eurociné** (Paris)

**Plaza Films International** (USA)

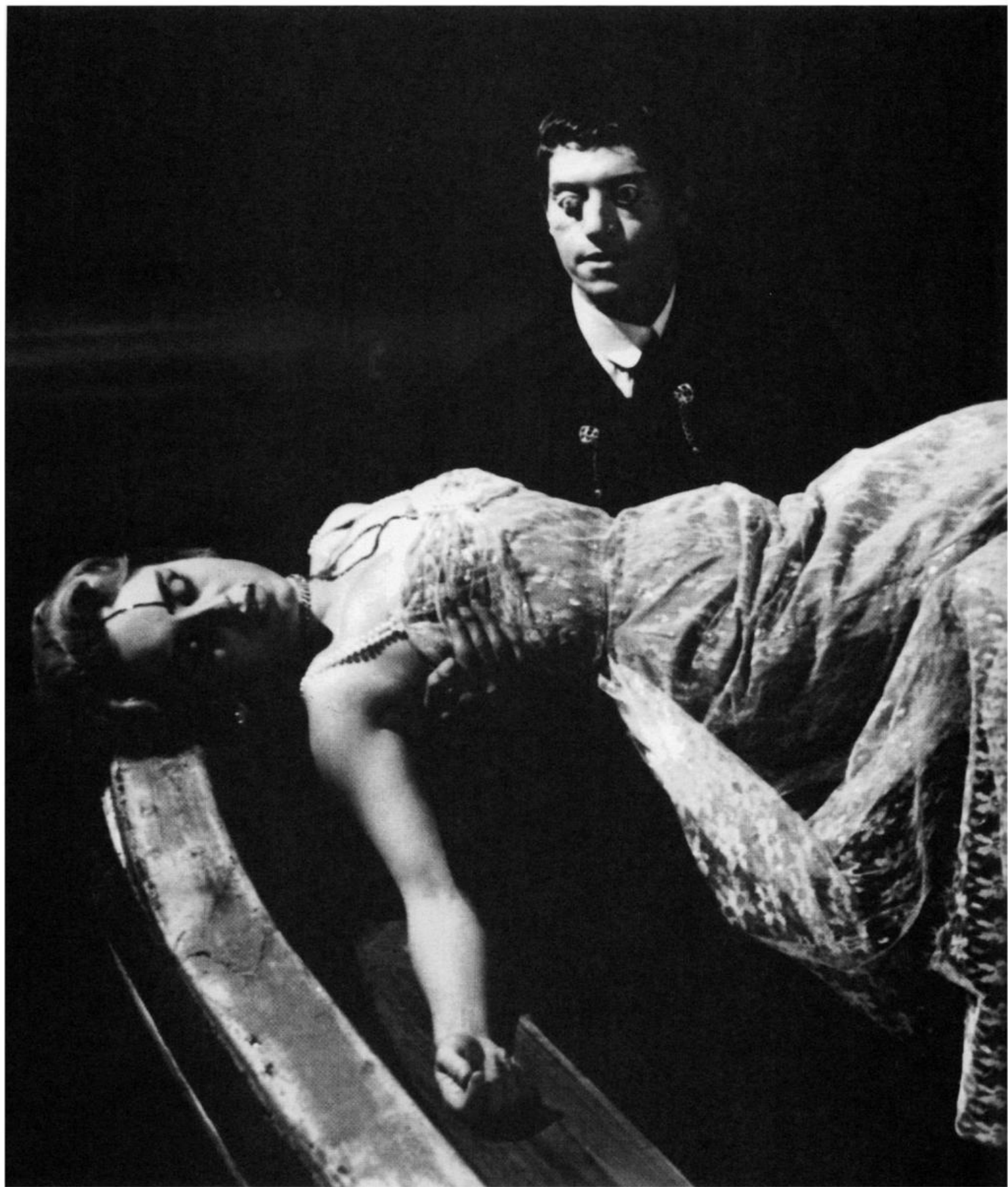
**Cast:** **Conrado San Martín** (Inspector Edgar Tanner). **Diana Lorys** (Wanda Bronsky/Melissa Orlof [*two roles*]). **Howard Vernon** (Doctor Orlof). **Ricardo Valle** (Morpho Lautner). **María Silva** (Dany, a cabaret dancer). **Mara Laso** (Irma Gold). **Venancio Muro** (Jeannot 'the tankard' Roussel, a vagrant). **Perla Cristal** (Arne, Orlof's mistress). **Fernando Calzado** [as 'Fernando C. Montez'] (Maurice, Tanner's assistant). **Félix Dafauce** (Tanner's boss). **Elena María Tejeiro** (Ursula Camille Marianne Francis Schneider, young female witness). **Juan [Antonio] Riquelme** (Kraus, police agent). **Javier de Rivera** (M. Hogan, antique dealer). **Ángel Calero** (older male witness). **Fernando Sala**. **Lali Vicent**. **José Carlos Arévalo** (younger moustached witness). **Sandalio Hernández** (Raimond, bearded pianist). **Rafael Ibáñez**. **María de la Riva** (Claire, flower-seller). **Faustino Cornejo** (man mistaken for Orlof). **Enrique Ferpi** (dancehall barman). **Juan García Tienda** (Elias Housemann, 'the thrill killer'). **Plácido Sequeiros** (Orlof and Dany's carriage driver). **Luis Rico** (police fingerprint expert). **Amy Márquez**. **Antonio Ramos**. **Carmen Porcel** (Madame Gold). **Rafael Hernández** (bald witness with moustache). **Luis Domínguez Luna**. **María del Carmen Ruiz**. **Marisa Paredes** [as 'María Luisa Paredes'] (Polly Paterson). **Pedro José R. Mariña**. **Pilar Gómez Ferrer** (Wanda's aunt). **Tito García**. **Mercedes Manera** (Beth, Claire's friend). **Manuel Vázquez [Gallego]** (Klein, police sketch artist). **Juan Antonio Arévalo** (younger policeman assisting Tanner). *uncredited:* **Jess Franco** (bar pianist).



*Howard Vernon, suave and sinister, and Ricardo Valle, handsome but deformed, as Doctor Orloff and Morpho. Glamorous María Silva (above) and brassy Mara Laso play the victims.*







**Credits:** director: **Jess Franco**. screenplay & dialogue: **Jess Franco**; based on an original story by **David Khune**. director of photography: **Godo [Godofredo] Pacheco**. editor: **Alfonso Santacafía**. art director: **Antonio Simont**. background music & musical direction: **José Pagán, Antonio Ramírez Ángel**. executive producer & technical production supervisor: **Sergio Newman**. production supervisor: **Ángel Rossón**. production manager: **Gerardo Mendiburu**. assistant production: **Miguel Asensio**. assistant director: **Alfredo Hurtado**. continuity: **Isabel Campo**. camera operator: **Javier Pérez Zofio**. camera assistant: **Isidro Muro**. still photographer: **Daniel Ortiz**. assistant editor: **Alicia Castillo**. settings & wardrobe supervisor: **María del Carmen Martínez Román**. assistant art director: **Félix Michelena**. property master: **Martín Sacristán**. seamstress: **Ángeles Castro**. special wardrobe: **Rando**. make-up: **Adolfo Ponte**. make-up assistant: **María Teresa Martín**. settings effects: **Pirax**. wardrobe: **Izquierdo**. props: **Luna**. filmed in **PanorVision**. laboratories: **Madrid Film** [SP prints] / **C.T.M.** (Paris) [FR prints add]. sound re-recording: **Fono-España** (Madrid) sound system: **Westrex Recording System**. *English/French versions* produced by **Leo Lax Films**. *uncredited* producer: **Leo Lax**.

**Synopsis:** *France, 1912. Doctor Orlof, assisted by his blind disfigured servant Morpho Lautner, abducts young women by night and takes them to his castle. After Morpho has murdered them, Orlof experiments on their corpses, searching for a means to surgically repair the burned features of his beloved daughter Melissa. He is assisted in his experiments by Arne, a woman indebted to Orlof because he'd helped her to escape from prison where she'd been incarcerated for a crime of passion. Morpho, a multiple murderer (who secretly loves Arne), also owes his liberty to Orlof, who rescued him from jail using a faked death certificate. As the toll of missing persons rises to five, Inspector Tanner is put on the case. His beautiful ballerina fiancée Wanda Bronsky takes an amateur interest too. A police sketch artist, working from eye-witness reports, establishes that there are two separate men involved in the disappearances. A necklace dropped from the body of one victim is found by Jeannot, a vagrant alcoholic, who tries to sell it, drawing suspicion upon himself. Having established that Jeannot is not the killer, Tanner begins to take an interest in the man's suspicions about a boat shed on the edge of town, and an ominous castle upstream from where the necklace was found. Meanwhile, Orlof and Morpho abduct another woman, this time keeping her alive to facilitate grafts from living tissue. Arne finally snaps at this cruelty and tries to alert the authorities. She is killed in a struggle with Orlof, who hides her body. Orlof sees Wanda in town one evening and, struck by her resemblance to Melissa, speaks briefly to her, raising her suspicions with his intense manner and burning eyes before fleeing into the night. Feeling sure that this is the man they are looking for, Wanda decides to investigate the case herself, going undercover as a high-class hooker called Tania and hanging out in a bar where several of the victims were last seen. It's not long before she attracts the attention of Orlof, who invites her to join him for champagne. Wanda sees him adding something to her wine and avoids*

*drinking it. Arranging for a note to be passed to the police, she pretends to be drugged and allows herself to be taken to Orlof's castle. However, Tanner doesn't read the note for several hours due to the high number of frivolous sightings from the public. In the nick of time he heads for Orlof's castle. Morpho discovers Arne's corpse and kills Orlof. Wanda swoons in horror and Morpho carries her to the castle battlements where he is shot dead by Tanner. The lovers are reunited and Tanner swears that from now on they will act as a team...*

"The first 'horror' movie made in Spain! A monster who killed five alluring women!" - original admat text for *Gritos en la noche*

"Nosferatu ... Dracula ... Dr. Mabuse ... All the nightmares of cinema, now manifested in a breathtaking and amazing film!"  
Spanish admat for *Gritos en la noche*, 8 March 1962

**Production notes:** *La reina del Tabarín* and *Vámpiresas 1930* established Franco as a commercial force in Spanish cinema, although the films were too parochial to make much of an impact abroad. What he needed was a subject that would allow him to stretch his creative wings and expand his repertoire, something more sensational and challenging than the pretty melodies and nostalgic sentiment of the musicals. What he really needed to embrace was... Politics! With *Vámpiresas 1930* on release, Franco met with Marius Lesoeur of Eurociné and Sergio Newman of Hispamer to discuss a new project called 'Los colgados' ('The Hanging Men') based on a book by Bruno Traven, the anti-capitalist, anarchist author of *The Treasure of Sierra Madre*. Also known as 'The Rebellion of the Hanged', it concerned a revolt by oppressed workers in the mahogany plantations of Mexico at the height of the rainy season.<sup>1</sup> In September 1961, *Variety* reported that José Suarez and Diana Lorys had signed up for a film to be directed by Jess Franco called 'Los Vengadores', in all likelihood the planned adaptation of 'Los colgados' as it sits precisely within the time frame.

With this ambitious project in mind, Franco and Sergio Newman began pre-production and arranged a meeting with the Spanish censor board, a necessity in the 1960s. Franco explained what happened next to Álex Mendibil: "The Ministry didn't say no at first, they just treated me paternalistically like I was a dumb kid. 'Are you really willing to get yourself into this mess?', shit like that. But in the end it was approved. I had the French and Spanish co-producers, a cast already assembled... Everything seemed to be on the right track. Then, a few days before the scheduled start of shooting, I received an official notification telling me, in general terms, to stick the movie up my arse. The powers that be decided to forbid it."<sup>2</sup>

Panic ensued. Actors were under contract, money was being squandered. The situation looked bleak. One evening, to unwind for an hour or two, Franco, Newman and Lesoeur decided to go to the cinema to see the Hammer film *The Brides of Dracula* (1960). Accounts vary as to what happened next. Carlos Aguilar reported that as the Gothic ghoulishness played onscreen, Lesoeur

and Newman asked Franco if he would like to make a horror film, saying, "Since we have trouble with censorship, why don't we do something this way?"<sup>3</sup> Franco jumped at the idea, and dashed off a script at high speed. To Àlex Mendibil, Franco put a different spin on the tale: "Out of sheer anger, I decided to make another movie right away, one that wouldn't bother those sonofabitches. 'A vampire flick', as I told the producers. I took them along to see *The Brides of Dracula*, they loved it, and that's how I made *Gritos en la noche*."<sup>4</sup>

While precise production dates are hard to ascertain, it seems that the film went before the cameras in the late autumn and early winter of 1961. Franco's visit to see *The Brides of Dracula* took place after the premiere of *Vampiresas* 1930, in the last week of September 1961, so bearing in mind the panic over the stalled production of 'Los colgados', filming must have been underway in October, or November at the latest (you can tell that the shoot took place in bitterly cold weather by the plumes of breath rising from the actors' mouths during outdoor scenes).

To everyone's relief, the audience response to *Gritos en la noche* was astounding. "Honestly I expected it to be a fiasco," Franco admitted, "But then I had a worldwide hit! It was from that moment that everyone wanted to make horror movies with me."<sup>5</sup> *Gritos en la noche* opened first in Barcelona on 9 March 1962 and gained considerable attention in the press, with even the hugely successful Barcelona football team reportedly trooping off to see it before an important match in the 1962 European Cup!<sup>6</sup>

**Review:** This is where the Franco story really begins. The story of a deranged turn-of-the-century surgeon trying to repair the ravaged face of his daughter by using unwilling female tissue-donors kidnapped from bars and nightclubs, *Gritos en la noche* – better known to the English-speaking world as *The Awful Dr. Orlof* – may look a trifle tame today but it was a bona fide shocker in 1962. Photographed in bravura black-and-white, with an instinctive flair for the cultivation of fear, it has a confidence and panache that leaps from the screen and announces the arrival of a major new talent. *The Awful Dr. Orlof* was the first Franco film to make an impact outside of Spain and France, and the first in a long line of extraordinary works in which sadism and eroticism combine. Technically, it's a beautifully shot, reasonably acted tale which plays out a pulp-ghoulish narrative with considerable élan. Symbolically, it's the wellspring from which many a dark and delicious tributary would spring over the next forty years of Franco's cinema. It's by no means his best film, but it lights the torch that illuminates the rest of his journey, from the cool prowess of his early work to the furthest video shores of his 21st century output. Anyone with even the slightest interest in Jess Franco needs to see *The Awful Dr. Orlof* because it introduces many of the themes and characteristics that would animate his entire career. Though it cannot deliver the explicit transgressions of the later work, it does show how succinctly and skilfully Franco could balance technical rigour with the flower of his own morbid obsessions.

The story has two main strands: one of them concerns the twisted goings-on chez Doctor Orlof (note the single letter 'f' in the name, which is doubled in all subsequent appearances), while the other features the faintly Hitchcockian pairing of an investigating cop and his spunky ballerina girlfriend. Horror fans may groan at the notion of the latter, fearing that any time spent with cops and their amateur sleuth girlfriends is bound to be a bore, but rest assured the scenes with the two lovers are quite brief and do actually have some charm. Besides, Hitchcock himself would surely have approved of a high-class ballerina played by gorgeous Diana Lorys (brunette, but you can't have everything) going undercover as a self-declared "shameless hussy" to flush out a maniac. Wanda's change of appearance, from lead dancer in a posh production of *Faust* to seductive lady-of-the-night 'Tania', is particularly eye-catching; her hooker's dress is a risqué delight, cupping her bosoms into a heart-shaped corsage, with braided ribbons attaching one breast to the other, nipple to nipple. Love, pulchritude and sadomasochism in one piece of costume!

The story progresses with smooth, stylish ease, with none of the drastic elision that marks Franco's later work. It's a fully functioning horror story in the traditional sense, with suspense and sudden frights as well as atmosphere. The opening appetiser – in which Orlof's deformed servant Morpho leaps from a woman's bedroom closet – sets up the shock element, while creepiness and suspense predominate during Orlof's seduction of a tipsy nightclub singer. Supposedly taking her back to his abode, "for more champagne, my dear", Orlof instead leads the unsuspecting woman to a shadowy, tree-wreathed townhouse. In her wine-sodden state she fails to notice the mansion is abandoned, with a 'For Sale' sign carelessly thrown into the long grass. What follows is an object lesson in wringing maximum atmosphere from a great location: strange music and shadowy lighting reign supreme as the drunken victim finds herself locked in the empty house before being savaged by the monstrous Morpho.

Much of the film's overtly horrific charge comes from Morpho's grotesque appearance. He's corpse-like, pale and waxy, staggering down the stairs with his feet twisting awkwardly, as though walking on broken ankles. He's reminiscent, too, of an automaton or mannequin, with sightless eyes goggling from their sockets like the orbs of some nightmarish broken doll. His face twitches and puckers at the lips as he seeks out victims, suggesting in a faintly repulsive way the blind, questing movements of slugs and snails. Such 'scary face' monsters are considered tame today, but Morpho must have generated a veritable symphony of screams from audiences in the early 1960s.

The warm relationship between the romantic leads, filmed in daylight much of the time, provides startling contrast to the mean-spirited, manipulative life of the night-dwelling villain. Orlof exploits the brain-damaged Morpho for his murderous strength, snapping at him impatiently and beating him like a dog, and preys upon maidservant Arnette's sense of obligation, dragging her into



his cruel schemes. Oh, and lest we forget: he callously butchers young women. "I'm fascinated by your skin [...] It's perfect. So soft and fresh," he purrs to an unsuspecting 'donor'. He commits his crimes to restore the beauty of the only person he cares about, his daughter Melissa. Orlof is thus the first of Franco's protagonist-villains, whose wickedness is shaded by a strange ambiguity: a capacity for endless love and devotion. This love is scrutinised and found wanting, however, as Franco draws out from it the hidden truth: egotism and the desire to control. It's significant that we never hear a word from Melissa herself, emphasising that Orlof's is a selfish love; one suspects that his desire to mend his daughter's damaged face has roots in an incestuous longing, the intensity of which is sublimated in his perverted surgery procedure. With his discord between tenderness and cruelty, Orlof is not unlike those concentration camp doctors who, having inflicted unbearable misery, returned home and settled back into the comforts of family life. How can love remain pure when it goes hand in hand with such evil? Orlof's unflagging devotion and tenderness is rendered implicitly perverse by proximity to his cruelty.

Numerous small pleasures add lustre to the film. Orlof's dark romantic castle broods among the poplars like an Arnold Böcklin painting sprung to life. Near-constant rain creates a cold, uncomfortable physicality, and helps to depopulate the streets through which Orlof and Morpho track their victims. At Orlof's castle, the heroine regains consciousness and gazes in horror at a portrait which appears to depict her own features (it's actually a portrait of Melissa). Franco adds a reverberant extra shock here: as Wanda flinches from the portrait, she gazes directly at the camera and reacts with terror. For a second it's as if she's perceived the very audience, until Franco cuts to a shot of her gazing at her reflection in a full-length mirror. But is it just a reflection? Wanda's reflected gaze is trained not at her own eyes, as should be the case, but directly at the camera; the actress is staring at 'us' through the mirror! Perhaps coincidental, the moment nevertheless enfolded a modernist acknowledgement of our voyeuristic pleasure in watching a frightened woman. Such breaking of the 'fourth wall' is a technique that Franco would revisit many times in years to come.

Prior to *The Awful Dr. Orlof*, Spanish cinema dallied little with the macabre. *La torre de los siete jorobados* ('Tower of the Seven Hunchbacks'), directed in 1944 by Edgar Neville, the Madrid-born Count of Berlanga de Duero, can probably claim to be the first genuine Spanish horror film, although occasional horror motifs cropped up in other places, mostly in comedies (one such example, of course, being Franco's own *Tenemos 18 años*). However, no one in Spain had yet thought to combine the Gothic trappings of the Universal horror films, the Germanic stylings of Expressionist cinema, and the burgeoning eroticism of the Hammer films. While all of these elements came ready-made, they were subtly mutated as they passed through the prism of Franco's sensibility. His innovation was to wed horror elements to a whiff of voyeuristic eroticism. Orlof hunts women in order

to steal their beauty for his macabre experiments, and spends his evenings lurking in the shadows of drinking dens and nightclubs, casting a chilly gaze over the buxom dancers and sexy singers. His predatory disposition is mimicked by the camera, which peers at the victims-to-be with a similarly calculating eye. Which is not to say that in its first incarnation, *Gritos en la noche*, the film was a riot of dangerous eroticism. Only in 1964, for the French re-release *L'Horrible Docteur Orlof*, would certain scenes be replaced with racier imagery (see "Other versions"). In its original form, the film is colder. What distinguishes *Gritos* today is not its groundbreaking erotic explicitness, but rather the director's tangled mesh of influences, revealing a voracious, thoroughly modern appreciation of both high and low culture. As the 1960s progressed, this would become positively *de rigueur* in mainstream artistic discourse, so Franco was a couple of years ahead. His tastes ranged from Fritz Lang to Sax Rohmer, Carl Dreyer to H.P. Lovecraft, Orson Welles to Edgar Wallace. Comic books, pulp literature, trashy noirs, cheap horror flicks, all were shuffled together in his imagination with the more established 'masterpieces' of cinema. *Gritos en la noche* enshrines Franco's magpie sensibility and his willingness to pursue sensation through the filaments connecting beauty and horror: a carefully composed, elegantly directed film that nevertheless deals in quivering females and morbid mutations.

*The Awful Dr. Orlof* is a film you can safely show to any fan of classic horror, even if they dislike the later films of Jess Franco. It's slick, creepy, and it's often quite beautiful to look at. Franco himself tended to express boredom with the film, regarding it as too early and primitive an example of his work to withstand much scrutiny today. That's understandable; he achieved so much afterwards. But don't let his ennui put you off; if you want to understand Franco's oeuvre, this is a great place to begin your investigations.

**Cast and crew:** To play Dr. Orlof, personifying regal elegance and cold malice in one handsome, old-European package, Franco cast Swiss-born Howard Vernon. The two men became firm friends and Vernon embarked on a creative journey through some of the most hellish and extraordinary realms of the Franco filmography, essaying over thirty screen roles ranging from icy grandeur to leering insanity. Vernon was recommended to Franco by Marius Lesoeur, however Franco was already familiar with the actor's work having supervised the Spanish dubbing of two of his earlier films, one of which was *La Môme vert de gris* (Bernard Borderie, 1953), the first outing for Eddie Constantine's private eye 'Lemmy Caution'. Franco had also admired Vernon in Jean-Pierre Melville's *Le Silence de la mer* (1949), and Fritz Lang's *The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse* (1960), and saw in his aristocratic air and penetrating eyes the *hauteur* needed to play the charming but cruel Dr. Orlof ... Conrado San Martín, who plays Inspector Tanner, was an amateur boxer from Ávila, Spain, who first caught the acting bug after working as an extra on the set of the Western *Oro vil* (1941). A veteran of more than fifty films prior to *Orlof*, he would appear in one further Franco project, *La muerte silba un*

*blues* (1962) ... Spanish comic artist and writer Manuel Vázquez Gallego (author of *El tío Vázquez* and *Anacleto, agente secreto*) has a cameo as the police sketch artist who draws portraits of Orlof and Morpho based on the descriptions of witnesses ... The film's immensely talented director of photography, Godofredo Pacheco, shot Franco's early short, *El árbol de España* (1957). They'd met while Franco was assistant director on Leon Klimóvsky's *Miedo* (1956) and *Viaje de novios* (1956), both of which Godofredo photographed, and they would go on to collaborate on two equally lustrous black-and-white features, *The Sadistic Baron von Klaus* (1962) and *Rififi en la ciudad* (1963). Pacheco also shot Harald Reinl's thriller *Der Teppich des Grauens* (which shares some of Orlof's Expressionist nocturnal streetscapes and in the USA glories under the irresistible title *The Carpet of Horror*), Narciso Ibañez Serrador's elegantly moody horror thriller *The House That Screamed* (1968) and Tulio Demichelli's daffy tale of mummies, vampires, werewolves and mad scientists *Los monstruos del terror* (1970), starring Paul Naschy. The camera operator on *Dr. Orlof* was Javier Pérez Zofio, who would eventually graduate to director of photography on Franco's *Un silencio de tumba* (1972), *La noche de los asesinos* (1973) and *Killer Barbys* (1996).

**Franco on screen:** Franco cameos in *Gritos en la noche* as a piano-player singing along with heroic vagrant Jeannot (Venancio Muro), in a bar-room scene regrettably cut from the French version.

**Music:** Franco's fearless taste in experimental music comes to the fore here, with a clattering, scraping, nightmare soundscape from the furthest shores of the European avant-garde. Although one suspects that Franco himself may have been largely responsible, the credited composers are Antonio Ramírez Ángel (at that time a radio broadcaster and professor of music at the Madrid Royal Conservatory) and his long-time friend and collaborator José Pagán. The two had worked together frequently since the early 1950s, providing the score for many films, including Carlos Saura's debut feature *The Delinquents* (1960), and they'd worked on *La reina del Tabarin* and *Vampiresas 1930*. The mayhem of *The Awful Dr. Orlof* however is in a league of its own. Ramírez Ángel and Pagán went on to score a crime thriller for Ricardo Blasco (*Autopsia de un criminal*, 1963), a horror film for León Klimovsky (*Ella y el miedo*, 1963), and an early film by Amando de Ossorio (*Escuela de enfermeras*, 1968). In 1972 Ramírez Ángel went solo for Klimovsky's *La saga de los Drácula* but afterwards both men dropped out of the industry; Antonio Ramírez Ángel died in Madrid in 1986.

**Locations:** The precise location of the story is a little obscure, but a 'For Sale' sign we see is in French, the nightclub where Orlof picks up some of his victims is called *Au Vieux Colombier* ('The Old Dovecote'), and the newspaper that publishes unkind comments about Inspector Tanner is *Le Figaro*, so France it would seem to be. However, some of the action takes place in a town called Hartog – there is actually no such place, although the word sounds Germanic. The architecture is also difficult to pin down; the film was shot in Madrid, but there's something a little Slavic about

certain exteriors, all of which helps to suggest a pan-European netherworld, some tiny, obscure country tucked in between the well-known European giants.

**Studio:** Estudios Ballesteros, S.A. (Madrid).

**UK theatrical release:** The film was released in the UK by Grand National Pictures as *The Demon Doctor*, and received an 'X' certificate from the BBFC on the 12th November 1963. See Appendix for details.

**Connections:** While it sets in motion Franco's long and tempestuous journey into horror-erotica, *The Awful Dr. Orlof* cannot be described as original in any other sense. The surgical motif is grafted wholesale (though allegedly unconsciously) from Georges Franju's masterful *Les Yeux sans visage* (more on that in a moment), the relationship between Doctor Orlof and Morpho is lopped from the Universal Frankenstein films; even the dread name of Dr. Orlof is a steal – cribbed from *The Dark Eyes of London* (1939), an Edgar Wallace adaptation in which Bela Lugosi plays the evil Dr. Feodor Orloff – while the title *Gritos en la noche* had already been used for the Spanish release of *Wanted for Murder* (1946), a British film based on an Emeric Pressburger script about a strangler on the loose in London. *Wanted for Murder* echoed the Jack the Ripper case, and so does *The Awful Dr. Orlof*: for a long time it was mooted that the Ripper who took such a brutal toll on women was, by day, a wealthy gentleman-doctor (a theory that Franco later used directly in his 1976 *Jack the Ripper*, recycling many of the narrative elements of *The Awful Dr. Orlof* in the process). The case of Jack the Ripper influenced another key movie in *The Awful Dr. Orlof*'s mongrel DNA: *The Lodger* (John Brahm, 1944), a noirish update of the 1927 Hitchcock tale, in which the killings are intertwined with a showbiz milieu of stage actresses in peril. Franco also cites Robert Siodmak's eerie noir *The Phantom Lady* (1944) as an influence, although connections are frankly tenuous. Finally, no exploration of the roots of Franco's horror debut would be complete without reference to the way in which Orlof, tapping his cane to guide the blind Morpho this way and that, echoes Dr. Caligari and his relationship with Cesare the Somnambulist in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920). Franco brings together this bodysnatcher's shopping list with shameless zeal, parading the same magpie sensibility he displayed in *Vampiresas 1930* while demonstrating this time that he has the necessary creativity to fuse the components ... The ballet-opera in which Wanda performs is, according to a poster seen outside the venue, 'Meyerbeer's Faust', with dance choreography by Diaghiloff (sic) – however, Meyerbeer never wrote an opera based on Faust, nor did he work with Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes. The cultural markers are highbrow, but their divergence from reality shows how Franco utilises such references not to shed light on his themes but to populate a parallel universe of favourites and fantasies. It also marks his taste for in-jokes: the poster for the production of Faust is headed "*La grande compagnie M. Lesoeur Jovera*", a nod to the director's new friend, producer and Eurociné head Marius Lesoeur. Contemporary Spanish reviewers







saw in the film parallels with a Spanish murderer from the 1870s known as 'the Sacamantecas', who attacked and disembowelled prostitutes. (The word 'Sacamantecas' had been around since medieval times, meaning essentially 'the bogeyman'). When finally apprehended, the killer was found to be a peasant farmer from Álava called Garayo Díaz, with – according to accounts of the time – an asymmetrical face of distinctly Neanderthal appearance. It is perhaps this deformed appearance, in combination with attacks on 'loose women', that led reviewers to associate Morpho with 'the Sacamantecas' ... 'Polly Patterson' (the victim in the opening scene) is also the name of a nightclub singer murdered by 'Count Marian' in *Tenemos 18 años*.

You might think that Georges Franju's 1960 masterpiece *Les Yeux sans visage*, about a surgeon murdering women and stealing their faces to repair the burned features of his daughter, is an obvious influence on *The Awful Dr. Orlof*. And yet oddly, though Franco was rarely shy about admitting his influences, he maintained that the Franju film was *not* an inspiration, telling *Amarcord* magazine that, "Both films were shot at the same time. It wasn't possible for me to copy him or for him to copy me. I shot in Spain, he shot in Paris. It may be that the story was "in the air"... it often happens in literature, in music too - there are ideas circulating. Franju and I discussed this and came to the conclusion that it wasn't possible that we'd copied each other."<sup>7</sup> Without wishing to labour the point, the facts are these; *Les Yeux sans visage* was released in France in January 1960, and first played in Paris that March. Certainly there was no possibility of Franju copying Franco! *Les yeux sans visage* opened in Madrid in September 1963 and Barcelona in October 1963 (as *Ojos sin rostro*), so it is possible that Franco simply didn't see the film until after his own was made. It seems a little odd, however, that Franco, an avowed horror fan who visited Paris frequently, managed to miss this controversial picture, which caused a sensation with French cinema-goers on its release. But then, why deny the connection? Franco has always been unguarded about such matters, and loves to make references to personal favourites in his work. If his story about taking Lesoeur and Newman to see *The Brides of Dracula* had instead referred to *Les Yeux sans visage*, I doubt that anyone would bat an eyelid. A cynic might say that Franco was reluctant to admit the influence because the borrowings from *Les Yeux sans visage* are close to plagiarism, but in fact the films have sufficient differences of style, tone and content to make such accusations invalid...

**Other versions:** There are two different versions of the film; the original Spanish cut, *Gritos en la noche*, and the spiced up French cut *L'Horrible Docteur Orlof*. It's the latter which has most often made its way onto video and DVD as *The Awful Dr. Orlof*. (A third alleged variant, from Italy, was unavailable for review.) Although tame by comparison with later Franco films, the brief moments of titillation added to the French version are pretty striking for the time. One addition occurs during the sequence in which Orlof operates on Irma (Mara Laso). In the original, the scene ends with Orlof's scalpel approaching the unconscious Irma's

face. In the French version, he pulls open her blouse and glides his scalpel between her breasts towards her throat, leaving a trail of blood. Quite what this has to do with treating Melissa's facial disfigurement is anyone's guess, but the shock and illicit eroticism is considerable. The second addition comes as Wanda explores the castle and finds a trussed-up female victim; before she can set the woman free she's attacked by Morpho, and in the struggle the monster gets a good old handful of her exposed breasts; again, the raciness is at the very edge of permissibility for 1962. The English language edition, released on DVD by Image Entertainment, is the French cut. The original Spanish release, *Gritos en la noche*, is available on DVD from Divisa. It runs 93m, ten minutes longer than the French. Much of the extra material is dialogue, which the film can manage without (although the reduction of material featuring Jeannot, a whimsical alcoholic, is regrettable). There is one instance, though, where cuts to the French version create a glaring continuity error: almost a minute has been removed from the opening sequence in which a drunken woman enters her room, undresses and puts on her nightgown, before discovering Morpho hiding in her wardrobe; so much is excised that the woman seems to change outfits as Morpho attacks her! (In the Spanish version she opens the cupboard door, pulls out a nightdress, closes the door and gets changed, then returns for a second garment, at which point Morpho attacks her). An Italian-subbed version which played on Italy's Rai Tre TV station several years ago is identical to the Spanish cut. The Italian theatrical cut, *Il diabolico Dottor Satana*, features a completely different credit sequence composed of a montage of stills, set to the most extraordinary cacophony on the soundtrack; Franco is credited on this print as 'Walter Alexander'. The film was edited down and released as four individually titled Standard-8 film shorts by Mountain Movies in the UK: they were "The Demon Doctor", "Lust For Blood", "The Body Snatchers" and "The Woman in the Coffin" and retailed for £3.50 each.<sup>8</sup>

**Problematica:** Billed actor Tito García is not visible in available prints. Antonio Ramos is listed *twice* in the opening cast list.

**Press coverage:** *ABC Andalucía* embraced the film but found the ending somewhat unsatisfying: "It is clear that in the creation of this impressive movie the narrative calculation of the director, Jesús Franco, suffers from an imbalance that can only be explained by his intention to impress at all costs, using 'suspense', more or less achieved, at the expense of sacrificing the human quality of the narration, and whatever realism some of the characters could have had ... The events developed in the film are overloaded with terror, and intrigue is vigorously maintained, and although gruesomeness is dominant throughout the film, in the last few meters the gloomiest tonalities are transformed into the softest rose-tinted ending imaginable. The mystery of [Orlof's] outrageous experiment [...] is well achieved, and especially in the first part the horrifying narrative succeeds in its aim to surprise [...] The camera work is good; composition succeeds in giving scenes and characters the right effects of light and shadows; the musical background is perfectly suited to those 'screams in the night'."<sup>9</sup> *ABC Madrid's* reviewer was also inclined to admire the

film's technical merits, but was clearly no fan of the horror genre: "This is one of those so called 'horror movies', with all the characteristic elements, among them the monster with a face made up of pieces of skin poorly sewn together; the look that 'freezes the blood' and, above all, the formal suit in which Orloff unfailingly commits his misdeeds [...]. *Gritos en la noche* is [...] in many ways superior to others of the same genre that preceded it, but really, was it worth wasting in so absurd and bizarre an endeavour the talent and experience of the young director Jesús Franco, the good craftsmanship of the actors, and all involved in it?"<sup>10</sup> *El Mundo Deportivo's* critic, on the other hand, was more indulgent: "*Gritos en la noche* is a horror movie, set in the molds most utilised in that genre, and while it's undefined as to where the humoristic ends and the hair-raising begins, in all cases it makes ample use of the effects of the genre [...] A retired physician ... murders girls of soft, tender skin with the help of some sort of blind vampire, a former prison inmate who stopped showing up in the census of the living. [The film's] main appeal is a group of young and beautiful actresses who constitute the best in the repertoire of 'coup de theatre' administered by the director, Jesús Franco; among them a mysterious castle, torrential rain, mysterious passageways, the cat, the owl and the enigmatic woman who knows a lot; amusing types like the one interpreted by Venancio Muro, and a police inspector and a policeman – who are clearly not about to overshadow Sherlock Holmes and his friend Watson – who succeed in their investigation only because everything is given them already solved."<sup>11</sup> In the UK, the *Monthly Film Bulletin's* reviewer seemed quite stunned, describing the film as, "At once appalling and unique, so bad as to be almost enjoyable for its ludicrous qualities," whilst going on to say, "an occasional shot or two is worthy of James Whale or Epstein." He also drew attention to the score, "containing as it does the weirdest collection of quasi-musical noises."<sup>12</sup>

## LA MUERTE SILBA UN BLUES

*Death Whistles a Blues*

**Spain [& France] 1962**

Spanish depósito legal number: M.6450-1962

French visa number: 30706

*Alternative titles*

**Agent 077 Opération "Jamaïque"** (FR theatrical)

**077 Opération Jamaïque** (onscreen FR video)

**Agent 077 Opération Sexy** (FR CNC visa listing)

**Opération Sexy** (alt. FR)

*Production companies*

**Naga Films S.A.** (Madrid)

**Eurociné** (Paris)

*Theatrical distributors*

**Rosa Films** (Barcelona)

**Eurocinéac** (Paris)

*Timeline*

Shooting date	April	1962
Classified for Spanish release	October	1962
Classification announced	07 December	1962
Seville premiere	03 July	1964
Barcelona	31 July	1964
French visa issued	03 May	1966
France*	28 June	1966
Madrid	06 February	1967

\*Eurociné, *Cinéma culte européen Vol. 1* lists the French visa issue date as 14 April 1965 and the French theatrical release as 1967.

*Theatrical running time*

Spain	85m
France	85m

*Cast:* **Conrado San Martín** (Alfred Pereira, aka 'João'). **Danick [Danik] Patisson** (Maira Santos). **Georges Rollin** (Paul Radeck, aka 'Paul Vogel'). **Perla Cristal** (Lina Radeck). **Manuel Alexandre** (Julius Smith). **María Silva** (Rosita, Joe the fisherman's wife). **Adriano Domínguez** (Commissioner Folch, who informs Radeck of Moroni's death). **Marta Reves** (one of Radeck's female friends). **Gérard Tichy** (Carlos Moroni, Radeck's right-hand man). **Fortunio Bonanóva** (Commissioner Fenton). **Ricardo Valle** (younger card player). **Ángel Menéndez** (Radeck's friend reading book). **Juan Cortés** (Radeck's friend sitting beside pool chatting to woman). **Rosita Palomares** [as 'Rosa Palomar'] (card player wearing extravagant hat). **Pilar Vela** (waterfront café barmaid). **Victoria Zinny** (Radeck's younger friend). **Agustín González** (Commissioner Fenton's assistant). **Xan das Bolas** (officer at checkpoint). **Antonio Giménez Escribano** ('President', who telephones Radeck at poolside). **Mike Brendel** (Pulgarcito, arm-wrestling organiser). **Joe Brown** (Joe, a fisherman). **Jimmy Wright** (Jim, a fisherman). **Miguel Madrid** (guitarist in Julius Smith's band). **Yocasta Grey** (nightclub hostess). **Pedro Fenollar** (doctor at Smith's deathbed). **Plácido Sequeiros** (Radeck's butler). **Antonio Padilla** (Commissioner Falk). **José Riesgo** (one of Pereira's pursuers). **Loli Álvarez** (little girl giving directions). *uncredited:* **Jess Franco** (nightclub saxophonist). **Guillermo Méndez** (pursuer wearing fez).

*Credits:* direction: **Jess Franco**. screenplay by **Jess Franco**, **Luis de Diego**. director of photography: **Juan Mariné**. editor: **Alfonso Santacana**. art director: **Tony [Antonio] Cortés**. background music: **Antón García Abril**. producer: **Nazario Belmar**. production manager: **Ramón Crespo**. assistant



production: **Francisco G. Gargoles**. assistant director: **Juan Estelrich**. camera operator: **Salvador Gil**. camera assistants: **Roberto Martín, José Climent**. still photography: **Antonio Ortas**. jazz music & songs: **Jess Franco**; lyrics: **Jess Franco, Juan Estelrich, Paul Grasel**; performed by **Whisky Club Jazz**. assistant editor: **Alicia Castillo**. set decorator: **Andrés Vallvé**. assistant art director: **Rafael Ferry**. set construction: **Juan García, Tomás Fernández**. property master: **Anselmo Zabala**. tailor: **Humberto Cornejo**. make-up: **Emilio Puyol**. laboratory: **Madrid Film**. furniture & props: **Mateos-Luna-Mengibar**. titles: **L.T.C. (Saint-Cloud) [FR prints]**. sound supervisor: **Jaime Torrens**. sound recordist: **Gabriel Basagañas**. sound system: **Klangfilm**. uncredited: producer: **Nazario Belmar**.

**Synopsis:** 1947: On behalf of Paul Radeck, a notorious arms trafficker, two men - Julius Smith and Federico de Castro, both of them musicians - attempt to smuggle a shipment of weapons into the USA. During a river crossing they are intercepted by a police patrol; Castro is shot down and Smith arrested ... New Orleans, ten years later: Lina, Castro's widow, is now married to Radeck, who has retired from crime and changed his name to Vogel. They live a life of idle luxury accompanied by an entourage of fashionable young friends. Julius Smith has just been released from prison and has found work playing trumpet at a New Orleans jazz bar owned by Carlo Moroni, Radeck's right-hand man. After seeing Lina enter the bar he plays a song called "Blues del Tejado" which Lina recognises: it was written by Castro, her dead husband, and dedicated to her. She tells Radeck of the encounter. A few days later Smith is hit by a car while leaving a nightclub. Before he dies he makes a garbled confession to Commissioner Fenton that seems to suggest that Castro may still be alive. Radeck receives a letter signed by Castro. It seems that he is alive after all, and out for revenge. Moroni learns that a stranger has arrived in the region asking questions about Radeck's past. A man calling himself 'João' has ensconced himself within the community and hangs out at a waterfront jazz bar. During the night, João breaks into Radeck's house, examines the contents of his safe, and leaves an LP record on at full blast. The song is "Blues del Tejado". Moira Santos, a cabaret singer at Moroni's club, also seems implicated. João comes under attack from Moroni and his thugs, but he escapes and, after killing Moroni, takes refuge with a group of Jamaican friends. Radeck, now increasingly jittery, confesses to Lina that ten years ago he'd betrayed Smith and Castro to the police. As the New Orleans carnival season gets under way, Radeck and Lina go to an appointment, apparently at the request of Castro. There they come face to face with Commissioners Fenton and Falk, and 'Federico de Castro' aka 'João' - who is in truth Alfred Pereira from Interpol. Radeck has fallen into a trap but escapes by holding Lina at gunpoint. Realising that Lina was in on the conspiracy, he kills her. Fleeing by car he eventually finds himself held at gunpoint by Moira. There's a struggle, the gun goes off, and Radeck drops dead at her feet.

**Production notes:** With *The Awful Dr. Orlof* Franco had created his first major success, and with success comes pressure to repeat

the winning formula. While he would soon attempt just that, his first priority was a crime thriller written with Luis de Diego called *La muerte silba un blues*. Shooting took place during April 1962 (just a month after *Orlof* opened) in the Southern coastal region of Huelva near the border with Portugal.<sup>1</sup> Franco used the region to represent New Orleans (or the island of Jamaica if you believe the French version). The story is influenced by Etienne Périer's 1956 thriller *Meurtre en 45 tours* ('Murder at 45rpm'), itself based on *A coeur perdu*, a novel by Pierre Boileau and Thomas Narcejac, in which a man who may or may not have been murdered 'haunts' his wife and her lover via 45pm records sent in the mail. *La muerte silba un blues* was classified by the Spanish censor board in October of 1962, but failed to enter Spanish distribution until July 1964.

**Review:** After the macabre majesty of *The Awful Dr. Orlof* Franco turned to the crime thriller, with this sober effort about a retired arms dealer terrorised by the vengeful 'ghost' of a man he'd once betrayed. Thanks to a great jazz score and lustrous monochrome photography, *La muerte silba un blues* is a feast for the eyes and ears; all that's lacking is better pacing, and a greater emphasis on action over dialogue.

The strongest performance here is from Perla Cristal as the villain's wife Lina Radeck. She brings to the film a melancholy glamour, and Franco's camera dotes on her whenever she's around, giving her numerous close-ups and framing her as a cross between tragic heroine and shady femme fatale. Conrado San Martín (Inspector Tanner in *The Awful Dr. Orlof*) pulls his weight too, playing a jocular fellow who may or may not be a sinister ghost from Paul Radeck's wicked past. However, the film lacks a compelling villain; despite looking uncannily like a young William Hartnell, Georges Rollin fails to convey the icy menace the role of Radeck demands. We can readily believe that retirement from crime has softened his character, but we need to see the old steel coming through, and apart from a brief scene in which he despatches a significant female character he's just too calm, too detached, to fully engage the viewer. It's really a shame that Franco's original choice for the role, Howard Vernon, was unavailable. (Vernon was listed in contemporary Spanish pre-production documents, but for some reason was ultimately unavailable.)

Fortunately the lighting and photography (by Juan Mariné, who shot *Labios rojos* and Franco's 1958 short film *El destierro del Cid*) compensate for deficiencies elsewhere. Franco aims for, and largely achieves, a sultry film noir atmosphere. A night-time punch-up in a boating supply warehouse, leading to murder on a seafront jetty, shows a perfect grasp of how to shoot and edit action sequences, a skill that subsequent cheaper films would see Franco forced to surrender. A sustained tracking shot into a trumpet being played by Julius Smith, an ex-criminal associate of the chief protagonist, has the flavour of Hitchcock (think *Young and Innocent*), even if the identity thus revealed lacks a strong enough payoff. An ambitious crane shot ascending a poolside springboard to look down upon

Radeck as he suns himself suggests that Franco has been absorbing the films of Orson Welles (even if the shakiness of the camera betrays that this is a low budget Spanish film, not a Hollywood movie). The highlight is an extended sequence without dialogue, showing João breaking into the Radeck household in the dead of night. After creeping around and examining the contents of Radeck's safe by torchlight (giving Franco the chance to stage plenty of spooky lighting effects) he slips an LP record on the turntable, turns it up full blast, and makes his escape through a window. The song, 'Blues del Tejado', was written by the dead man for his old flame, now Lina Radeck, and it's around this eloquent musical motif, signifying both the heartbreak of lost love and the sinister intrusion of the past into the present, that the plot essentially turns. If the film lacks a killer punch, it is not without a strain of sombre dignity, carrying with it the first shadings of a melancholy that will recur throughout Franco's career.

**Franco on screen:** Franco cameos as a tenor sax player in a jazz band for an early scene with the trumpeter Julius Smith. Looking young, fresh-faced, and confident with the instrument, he's clearly in his element.

**Cast and crew:** In a daring choice for the time (and with a refreshing absence of sensationalism) Franco depicts a mixed-race marriage between two secondary characters, Joe (Joe Brown) and Rosita (vivacious blonde actress María Silva). Silva is one of four performers carried over from *The Awful Dr. Orlof*, along with Perla Cristal, Conrado San Martín and Ricardo Valles. The latter of course is *The Awful Dr. Orlof's* Morpho, here looking strikingly handsome without the goggle-eyed corpse make-up. Valles is one of the retinue of friends who hang around with the Radecks, along with Marta Reves (in the first of her six roles for Franco, the most prominent of which is *Kiss Me Monster's* lesbian cult leader Irina), Rosita Palomares (who pops up again in 1971 as Aunt Abigail in *Virgin among the Living Dead*) and Ángel Menéndez (making the first of eight minor appearances for Franco, ending with *Night of the Skull* in 1973). Also turning up together are Miguel Madrid (future director of 1971's frankly deranged *Necrophagus* aka *Graveyard of Horror*) and his wife-to-be Yocasta Grey (aka María Paz Madrid, *Necrophagus's* frosty matriarch Barbara). Miguel Madrid, who worked for Franco again a few months later in *The Sadistic Baron von Klaus*, is the guitarist in a jazz band alongside Jess Franco on saxophone, while in the same scene Yocasta Grey plays the nightclub hostess ushering the leading cast to their seats. Perhaps the Madrids actually met while working on this film? Also of note is Fortunio Bonanova, here playing Commissioner Fenton; a Spanish born actor who worked for Billy Wilder in *Double Indemnity* (1944), Otto Preminger in *Whirlpool* (1949) and Robert Aldrich in *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955), his most significant role was in *Citizen Kane* (1941), in which he played the exasperated opera coach trying to school Kane's talentless wife.

**Music:** 'Blues del Tejado' or 'Rooftop Blues', the song around which the story revolves, is a smoky trumpet-led number in the

Julie London vein and sounds like something Dorothy Vallens might sing in *Blue Velvet* (preferably in Spanish, as the English lyrics scan atrociously). It had already received an airing in *Vampiresas 1930*, but this new arrangement is the definitive one. The remaining score is cool jazz with a few avant-garde moments, lending an agreeably classy tone to the film. Franco himself wrote the jazz numbers (including 'Blues del Tejado'), whilst Anton García Abril is credited with 'background music', referring to the relatively minimal orchestral elements which pop up from time to time. Abril, however, was no slouch when it came to scoring; among his many credits (175 at least) is the peerlessly spooky music for Amando de Ossorio's 1971 classic *Tombs of the Blind Dead*.

**Locations:** Despite onscreen affirmation in writing, there's little to convince the viewer that we're really in New Orleans. Some scenes were shot in the marshy landscape around the Port of Huelva in Andalusia. Curiously, three of the featured cars in the film have numberplates beginning with the letter 'Z' indicating the Northern-Eastern Spanish province of Zaragoza. Could some of the film have been lensed there? The studio material was shot in Madrid, which is considerably closer to Zaragoza than Huelva; perhaps only a small amount of shooting took place in the South.

**Studio:** Estudios Sevilla Films (Madrid).

**Connections:** Franco remade this film for Eurociné in 1973 as *Kiss Me Killer*, and reshuffled a few of its themes in *Sangre en mis zapatos* (1983). He also sold what he claimed was the same script to Argentinian-born producer/director Tulio Demicheli, resulting in *Da 077 intrigo a Lisboa* aka *Espionage in Lisbon* (1965) starring Brett Halsey. However there are few similarities between *La muerte silba un blues* and *Espionage in Lisbon*, apart from the presence of a character called Moira. ... Thanks to the emergence of the Spanish version, we can now establish that *La muerte silba un blues* marks the first appearance of that perennial Franco character, private investigator Al Pereira, introduced to us here as "*Alfred Pereira of Interpol*". The name is sourced from Hal Pereira, an art director who worked on many Hollywood films, including Hitchcock classics like *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, *To Catch a Thief* and *The Trouble with Harry*. Read on to discover the hard times that await Pereira in later Franco films...

**Other versions:** *La muerte silba un blues* was retitled *Agent 077 Opération "Jamaïque"* for its limited French release in June 1966. Among the differences between the two, the Spanish version declares that the prologue happened ten years before the main action, while the French cut says just five years have elapsed. The French version omits about forty seconds of Pereira creeping into Radeck's house to leave his musical calling card, presumably to add more pace, although other scenes need tightening more than this one. Otherwise, *Agent 077 Opération "Jamaïque"* is identical to the original except for the dubbing, which for some reason replaces the name 'Alfred Pereira' with the incongruously jokey 'Agent 069' (pronounced 'Agent Zero-Soixante-Neuf', so there's no doubt it was meant to be funny). As there's neither sex nor

comedy tomfoolery in the film it's hard, at first, to understand why this seemed like a good idea; it's a bit like re-dubbing *Touch of Evil* to turn Quinlan into 'Quimlap'. A third variant apparently exists: the story goes that some time later Franco shot inserts to 'sex up' *La muerte silba un blues*, creating a new version (currently unavailable for comparison) called, variously, *Agent 077 Opération Sexy* or simply *Opération Sexy*.

**Problematica:** Some sources incorrectly state that José María Tassó appears in the film.

**Press coverage:** There were some warm accolades this time, with one Barcelona critic hailing, "*An interesting movie revealing the careful work of a competent director who wants to stay away from the well-worn path and succeeds in making a film with moments of excellent quality and tone. The screenplay is good, although it follows the conventional formulas of the detective and suspense genres. The mise-en-scene, without being extraordinary, reflects the director's sensitivity and conscientious work, and his characteristic personal style. The photography, in black and white, strongly reflects those qualities and helps to create a sense of intrigue, which is highlighted by the music. These two elements give the film its originality and strength, supported by good dialogue and editing based on short sequences that provide the basic elements of the story. La muerte silba un blues is a movie of merit, and reveals Jesus Franco as a director of considerable talent.*"<sup>2</sup> Another critic, however, found the film confusing, claiming that, "[It] presents so many complications in the narrative that from the beginning the viewer struggles with situations and scenes so confusing that he is kept looking for ways to balance the facts with only the slightest possibility of conveniently situating them."<sup>3</sup>

#### Theatrical distributors

**Hispamer Films, S.A.** (Madrid)

**Eurociné** (Paris)

#### Timeline

Shooting date	late autumn	1962
French visa issued	08 August	1963
France premiere	13 September	1963
Barcelona	27 January	1964
Seville	25 May	1964
France re-release	July	1967

#### Theatrical running time

Spain	94m
France	99m

**Cast:** **Howard Vernon** (Baron Max von Klaus). **Paula Martel** (Karin). **Turia Nelson** (Dorian Vincet). **Gogó Rojo** [as 'Gogó Robins'] (Margaret, a barmaid). **Hugo Blanco** (Ludwig von Klaus). **Fernando Delgado** (Karl Steiner, journalist). **Ana Castor** (Lida, bar owner). **Manuel Alexandre** (Theo, 'the machine'). **Georges Rollin** (Inspector Borowski). **Serafin García Vázquez** (Hansel, 'the brain'). **Joaquín Pamplona** (Steiner's editor). **José Luis Coll** (hotel guest who wants to leave). **Emilio Alonso** (police sergeant). **Miguel Madrid** (Fritz, Kanburg Hotel concierge). **José Carlos Arévalo** (Helmund, Borowsky's assistant). **Ángel Menéndez** (Doctor Kalman). **Dina Loy** (woman killed in pre-credits sequence). **María Francés** (Elisa von Klaus, Ludwig's mother). **María Rosa Mallén** [as 'Rosa Mayén']. **Carmen Mora**. **Manuela Castro**. *uncredited:* **Marius Lesoeur** (man blocking traffic on bridge).

**Credits:** director: **Jess Franco**. writers: **Gonzálo Sebastián de Erice**, **Juan Cobos**, **Pío Ballesteros**, **Jess Franco**; based on "*La Main d'un homme mort*" by **David Khunne**. adaptation & dialogue: **René Sébille**. director of photography: **Godo [Godofredo] Pacheco**. editor: **Ángel Serrano**. art director: **Antonio Cortés**. music: **Jess Franco & Daniel White**. producers: **José López-Brea & Jess Franco**. production supervisor: **Pío Ballesteros**. production manager: **Miguel Asensio**. location manager: **Francisco Yagüe**. assistant production: **Martín Sacristán**. assistant directors: **Enrique [Enrico] Bergier**, **Gonzálo Sebastián de Erice**, **Juan Cobos**. camera operator: **Jorge Herrera**. camera assistant: **Saturnino Pita**. stills: **Daniel Ortiz**. assistant editor: **María Luisa Soriano**. assistant art director: **Wolfgang Burmann**. set decorator: **Andrés Vallvé**. set construction: **Tomás Fernández**. property master: **Natalia García**. seamstress: **Ángeles Castro**. make-up: **Emilio Puyol**. make-up assistant: **Manuela Castro**. props: **Luna**. tailor: **Cornejo**. filmed in **Totalvision**. lab: **Fotofilm-Madrid**. titles: **C.T.M.**. [FR print] sound re-recording: **Audio Films, S.A.** sound system: **Westrex Recording System**. *French version* by **E.D.P.S.**, adapted by **Michel Luckin**.

## THE SADISTIC BARON VON KLAUS

**Spain [& France] 1962**

Spanish depósito légal number: M.725-1963

French visa number: 27905

*Original theatrical title in country of origin*

**La mano de un hombre muerto** (*The Hand of a Dead Man*)

#### Alternative titles

**Le Sadique baron von Klaus** (FR theatrical)

**Le Sadique** (FR provincial theatrical) *The Sadist*

**Sinfonia per un sadico** (IT theatrical) *Symphony for a Sadist*

**Hysterical sadique** (FR video) *Hysterical Sadist*

**O Sádico Barão von Klaus** (POR DVD)

#### Production companies

**Albatros Film C.P.C.** (Madrid)

FR prints add: 'a **Georges Estin-Eurocinéac** release' (Paris)





**Synopsis:** In the Austrian Alpine town of Holfen, a young woman is found murdered. Theo and Hansel, two wood-cutters, stop off at a bar where they tell Dr. Kalman, an academic studying local folk tales, about the history of the von Klaus family, in particular the murderous cruelty of the first Baron von Klaus, whose 17th century ghost is said to haunt the mists and quagmires of the surrounding countryside. Soon after, the wood-cutters discover the dead body of another young woman. The current patriarch of the von Klaus family, and chief suspect for the murders, is Max, who lives with his elderly sister Elisa. Elisa is dying, which prompts a visit from her son Ludwig, accompanied by his fiancée Karin. Elisa reveals to Ludwig the whereabouts of a key to the von Klaus dungeon which has been locked for many years. She begs him to end the family curse for all time and to take his fiancée far away. Ludwig enters the dungeon and finds a memoir written by the original Baron von Klaus, expounding his amoral philosophy. Later that night Dorian Vincet, a chanteuse at the bar, leaves after her show to meet a man at a local hotel; the man (his face concealed) stabs her to death with an antique dagger. Max, under the assumed name of Rudolf Bender, spends a night at a local hotel. He is in a secret relationship with a married woman; Lida the local bar owner. When Max is arrested under suspicion of murder, Lida is forced to come forward and reveal their relationship in order to save him. That night a masked intruder enters Lida's bedroom and tries to kill her but is frightened away when someone raises the alarm. A posse of townspeople give chase but the trail ends in the graveyard - the attacker has vanished. Meanwhile Margaret, a beautiful barmaid in the town, is seduced by Ludwig. But has he been spending too much time in the family cellar reading Baron von Klaus's memoirs?

**Production notes:** By now, Franco was building up speed. Straight after *La muerte silba un blues* he had *La mano de un hombre muerto* ready to go. Precise shooting dates are hard to find, but actress Gogó Rojo, who plays a glamorous waitress in the film, told a Madrid newspaper on the 15th of December 1962 that she had recently finished shooting, and expected the film would be released quite soon.<sup>1</sup> In fact, *La mano de un hombre muerto* languished for over a year awaiting its Spanish debut, eventually opening at the end of January 1964 (six months before the similarly delayed *La muerte silba un blues*). Bizarrely, it then spent some time on a double bill with the Burton-Taylor epic *Cleopatra*! Franco's increasing ties with the French company Eurociné meant the film saw the light of a French projector first; it was released (minus an opening murder scene and the torture of a bound woman) as *Le Sadique baron von Klaus*, on 13 September 1963. In the meantime, Franco was no doubt gratified to see *Labios rojos* make it to the screen, after a three year delay, playing at Seville's 'Los Remedios' cinema from 1 March 1963.

**Review:** Though visually beguiling in gorgeous black-and-white, *La mano de un hombre muerto*, aka *The Sadistic Baron von Klaus*, is too slow for its own good, taking a long time to get to the dramatic meat and padded out with incessant gabble from police, a pair of

superstitious bumpkins, and an irritating journalist. Replete with stiff-faced men debating crimes we scarcely see it offers little in the way of sensationalism, until two-thirds of the way through when Franco springs upon us a truly startling and memorable sequence pointing the way to all the sleazy marvels of his later career.

This is the tale of a young man's slide into libertinage, a slide undertaken with the vertiginous sense of *knowing* one is falling. Ludwig von Klaus is an unusual monster, fully aware that the further he descends into the abyss, the less chance he will have of living a normal life. Our young anti-hero even agonises about this after killing his lover, despairing that he will never be able to step back and enjoy the comforts of home and hearth. Instead he has been seduced by the siren call of amoral freedom, the extreme sensualist's charter of selfish pleasure and hedonistic excess. Franco sets this up through the classic ghost story notion of an evil ancestor who corrupts the younger man's soul (hence the original Spanish title, which translates as 'The Hand of a Dead Man'). However, the ghostly elements are kept firmly in check, with only a few brief voice-overs to suggest the call of a malign spirit, and even these can be easily explained as Ludwig's insane delusions. Real corruption comes not through spookery, but through exposure to the realm of ideas: on the death of his mother Ludwig is given the key to the family cellar, and discovers not only tools of torture but also a memoir explaining the libertine philosophy of the original Baron von Klaus. Just as the book excites Ludwig's imagination, so too does it pique the interest of the viewer, as it makes the ancestral Baron inescapably reminiscent of Franco's chief literary influence, the Marquis de Sade. *The Sadistic Baron von Klaus* has little by way of story to recommend it, however, as a metaphor for the way the writings of the Marquis de Sade exerted their influence upon the youthful imagination of Jess Franco, the film comes alive. For the malign influence of an older relative, it's easy to substitute De Sade, the ultimate black sheep of European arts and letters. Jess Franco came from an educated family background in which high culture was sacrosanct, so his discovery of De Sade must have felt like an incredibly seductive invitation to leave behind bourgeois norms. Franco's career shows him taking that journey, in symbolic form, through his cinema. *The Sadistic Baron von Klaus* may only deliver the cruelty and lust of De Sade's work in one key scene, but it also depicts a character for whom, rather like Franco, the door to libertinage is creaking temptingly ajar. Six years later Franco directed *Marquis de Sade's "Justine"* (1968) after which the floodgates opened: he made at least eight more loose adaptations of the Marquis, not to mention many other films of a blatantly Sadean bent.

Once we arrive at the film's key scene, in which Ludwig takes his secret lover Margaret to the torture chamber for a practical exploration of his ancestor's ideas, the film finds its feet, getting down and dirty with some female nudity and intimate fondling. It's all far more daring than one would expect for 1962. Actress Gogó Rojo's exposed breasts are surprising enough; that Hugo Blanco is

◀ Margaret (Gogó Rojo) finds Ludwig Von Klaus (Hugo Blanco) desirable... but deadly.

seen to grope them and lower his mouth onto them is even more startling. The scene is further unsettling because of the supine, partially aroused demeanour of the victim. Admittedly she's been drugged, and she's embroiled in a passionate love affair with the killer, but the way she responds to his caresses suggests that she's masochistically turned on, despite her fear. Strong meat in any movie, never mind a Spanish one made under General Franco. As Ludwig belabours the girl with a knotted rope, the jiggling of the actress's buttocks leaves us in no doubt that the game is being played quite vigorously by all concerned. Even when Franco simply *has* to obscure what's going on, for instance when Ludwig suspends Margaret by her wrists and takes a heated sword to her flesh, he captures an unnerving eroticism by showing the victim from the knees down, her bare feet stretching and arcing on tiptoe, redolent of a dancer's expressive movements. By conveying agony through the eyes of a callous aestheticism, Franco finds a way to symbolise the Sadean mind-set without falling foul of the censor.

For the rest, the pleasures of this well-photographed production are purely decorative. Scenes take place in autumnal shade, with dappled light and strewn leaves, or else they're snowbound and frosty (the discovery of a dead woman in a winter field, for instance, provides a beautifully desolate image). Throughout his career Franco made excellent use of architecture; here he has victims stalked at night down parades of stone arches which amplify footfalls and threaten danger behind each pillar. When the killer attacks Lida in her bedroom, it's a textbook scare that would work just fine in a decent Seventies slasher movie like *Black Christmas* or *Communion*. Sadly, though, the attack comes to nothing and the scene peters out. Further pictorialism enlivens a chase through night-lit streets into the local cemetery, but the story itself never keeps pace with these visually appealing details. Howard Vernon returns to the Franco fold, but he's less well served this time, as he plays the only red herring, a thoroughly ordinary 'decent man' shielding his married lover, with nothing in the role to tax his considerable prowess. The female lead is unremarkable (not Paula Martel's fault, but Franco's - the character has literally nothing interesting to say or do), and the police chief, Inspector Borowski, is possibly the blandest cop Franco has ever written. As for the dialogue between Borowski and Steiner the crime journalist, which takes up great swathes of screen time, it's so fundamentally boring one could be forgiven for abandoning the film a third of the way through. But stick with it: if you're willing to overlook some major flaws and enjoy the pretty photography as you wait for that six minute dungeon scene, *The Sadistic Baron von Klaus* is a precursor to some of the darkest currents in Franco's cinema.

**Cast and crew:** Among the actors, only Hugo Blanco makes a strong impression, communicating both selfishness and a sort of helpless naivety which adds a poignant dimension to his surrender to evil. Born Hugo Blanco Galiasso on 22 January 1937 in Chaco, Argentina, he's one of those odd actors who seems to have slipped through the industry with neither critical acclaim nor fan cultism

to mark his passage. Which is a shame; he's a handsome and likeable screen presence. He worked regularly, mostly in Spanish or Italian Westerns such as *Ocaso de un pistolero* (Rafael Romero Marchent, 1965), *Texas Addio* (Ferdinando Baldi, 1966), *The Ugly Ones* (Eugenio Martin, 1966) and *Sartana Does Not Forgive* (Alfonso Balcázar, 1968). His other interesting credits include Umberto Lenzi's *A Quiet Place to Kill* (1970) and *The Glass Ceiling* (1971) by Eloy de la Iglesia ... Another Argentinian, Gogó Rojo, made her screen debut in the film at the age of nineteen, playing Ludwig's unfortunate girlfriend Margaret. Rojo's screen name Gogo Robins was, she told a newspaper in December 1962, the result of a 'survey' among her friends: Franco was the one who chose it, with the approval of everyone, including Gogó herself. Describing *The Sadistic Baron von Klaus* as "pure suspense of course, but with hints of humour," she added, "I was lucky to play the role with such a cheerful and lively cast."<sup>2</sup> Sadly her film career afterwards was a sparse affair, with roles for directors like Julio Buchs, José María Elorrieta and Fernando Fernán Gómez among a few others. She returned to the Franco fold briefly in 1971, with *Los amantes de la isla del diablo*, playing Lola, a female prisoner.

The writing credits are something of a pile-up, with four names (Gonzalo Sebastián de Erice, Juan Cobos, Pío Ballesteros and Franco) cited for the scripting, and a fifth, René Sébille, credited with adaptation and dialogue. Of these others, Sébille is the most interesting: he was the author of a handful of French-language books, including *Sans craintes ni murmures* (1945), *Le Silence du matin* (1947), *La Commandante* (1947) and *Cimetière de femmes* (1948), and the leading light of a short-lived Parisian literary movement called 'Intimatism', about which *Time Magazine* reported in 1947: "Ten couples met in a huge Left Bank apartment. They had foregathered to practice the latest Parisian intellectual pretension - intimatism. Present were the high priest of the movement, dynamic René Sébille, 34, and some of his ardent disciples. The men were journalists and writers. The girls were young and pretty [...] A mixture of Emersonian transcendentalism, Indian mysticism and garden-variety lust, intimatism is concerned with the harmony of the individual. It holds that man alone cannot find harmony; he requires woman. Says Sébille: the only way for men & women to understand themselves better is 'to love each other more.' 'Two by two we will vanquish egotism, cowardice, jealousy and solitude.'" <sup>3</sup> By the sound of it, Franco had found in Sébille a fellow traveller in sensualism (although the 'two by two' reference sounds a tad unadventurous), leading one to wonder if he ever attended an Intimatist meeting!

**Music:** *The Sadistic Baron von Klaus* introduces composer Daniel J. White to the Jess Franco universe. A Yorkshire-born Englishman living in Paris, White's formidable skills as writer, arranger and musician contribute enormously to the Franco oeuvre. Before they met he had written songs for Edith Piaf, worked with Dizzy Gillespie, and composed scores for thirty-three films. These small French productions saw little release abroad but they allowed him to hone his style, a combination of classical and jazz. Franco



would go on to use White's music in at least forty pictures, often collaborating by performing the more atonal avant-garde elements himself. White's piano-led score for *The Sadistic Baron von Klaus* is scored in two clashing stylistic registers, swooning classicism and grating avant-gardism, which mirrors the duality at the heart of the film. The rage of the sadist is powerfully represented, with the jagged scraping and twanging reminding us that the pianist is creating these harsh, atonal sounds by prodding and probing around inside the 'guts' of the instrument, rather as Ludwig intends to do with his victims. In the final scenes at the swamp, we hear for the first time a Daniel White composition that would turn up many times in the future: a tune in 5/4-time reminiscent of Dave Brubeck's famous 'Take 5', played here for solo piano.

**Locations:** Shooting took place in two small towns in the Spanish Pyrenees, nestling in the Baztan Valley of Navarre. The first, Elizondo, was used for most of the town sequences, including those on a bridge across the Baztan river; other scenes were filmed in nearby Erratzu, which can also be seen in the Franco-penned *Llegaron los franceses* (León Klimovsky, 1959).

**Studio:** Estudios C.E.A. (Ciudad Lineal, Madrid).

**Connections:** "I hope these memoirs will be used by my descendants as a guide," writes the deceased Baron von Klaus, "an initiation into a passionate world of rare and unknown sensations, a seductive and tragic world bred in pain and blood, the tragic eroticism of all the senses, finally ending in death." Such sentiments have the unmistakable ring of the Marquis de Sade, whilst the phrase "tragic eroticism" is drawn from a chapter heading in Georges Bataille's *The Tears of Eros*, first published in French in 1961 ... Franco has Ludwig wear, of all things, a duffel-coat as he stands over the unconscious Margaret, a mundane detail that directly echoes another chillingly ordinary killer, Mark Lewis in Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* (1960). Interestingly, both killers have been corrupted by exposure to the ideas of a dominant male relative ... Apropos of nothing, we hear Baron Max von Klaus (Howard Vernon) ask his manservant, "Where is the book about Marienbad?"

**Other versions:** The original Spanish cut, *La mano de un hombre muerto*, begins with an unsettling pre-credits montage excised from *Le Sadique baron von Klaus*. Totalling ninety-seconds, the missing material begins with a crane shot advancing on a cottage window at night, with the camera passing through a clothes-line of ladies apparel. Cutting to within the cottage, we see a hatted figure silhouetted at the window. A trio of shots depict Dina Loy (in her first of several roles for Jess) gazing at the camera, clasping a torn curtain, then lying on a bed in what appears to be a torture chamber. The woman is then garrotted, in deliberately stylised 'imitation slow-motion', by someone wearing a white stocking mask (possibly another woman – lipstick is daubed on the stocking). A cut back to the silhouetted figure seems to imply that the figure is observing the murder, not participating. The stocking-masked figure then stabs the woman who is lying passively on a bedspread (a shot filmed in a mirror positioned on the ceiling). All of which

is very strange, unsettling and intriguing. Who is the watcher? Who is the masked assailant? Perhaps the reason the sequence was removed is that these questions are never answered in the film! And yet, opaque though this montage may seem from a strictly rational point of view, it does serve a useful function; to create heightened expectation and lend the film a creeping undertow of menace and eroticism. Menace is amplified too during the Kanburg hotel-room murder of nightclub singer Dorian Vincet, which in the Spanish version involves three stabs to the gut with a long blade; the French cut eliminates all but one plunge of the knife, considerably neutering the impact. Also missing from the French version is a scene in which the von Klaus family servant discovers Steiner, the journalist, exploring the torture chamber in which the dead body of Margaret hangs by the wrists. Displaying a previously unsuspected commitment to Ludwig's privacy, the servant leaps on Steiner and attacks him. The struggle ends with Steiner throttling the man with his bare hands. This was perhaps cut because it made no sense; the manservant ignores Margaret's corpse, which suggests that he's in cahoots with Ludwig, although we never see or hear anything between them to support the idea.

The sequence in Ludwig's torture chamber is the first example of Franco shooting two different versions simultaneously (one clothed and circumspect, the other nude and explicit) with the intention of using the former in the home market and the latter for export. The explicit material was clearly shot at the same time as the rest; the set dressing, the actors, all match up. However, in the Spanish cut Gogó Rojo remains swathed in an evening dress and we never see her harmed. Even the shots of Ludwig placing irons in a brazier are removed; instead he simply clasps Margaret in a rough embrace, at which point the film cuts to him leaving the house.

In the French version an exchange of dialogue between Ludwig and Margaret is left curiously undubbed. After she says, "So it's you, you're the killer", and he replies, "I don't know - I really don't", both characters continue talking but the dubbing neglects to follow. Judging by Margaret's body language, the exchange must have involved some kind of erotic acquiescence on her part. We see Ludwig lean over her, and she kisses him passionately. She then mouths dialogue as his head descends southwards out of frame, leading us to suspect that he is cementing her submission with a spot of cunnilingus ... Alain Petit records that when the film was first released in Paris, in September 1963, it was lacking any salacious or violent scenes, despite publicity materials in the theatre lobby indicating their existence. Petit believes that the film was hurriedly cut by the exhibitor to avoid punishment by the censor. The magazine *Midi Minuit Fantastique* ran a report on the film's uncut Belgian screening a few months later, but the full export version would not be screened in Paris until a re-release in July 1967. Meanwhile the film was advertised in the French provinces under the shorter title *Le Sadique* ...

The Italian theatrical release is sometimes erroneously recorded as 'La bestia del castello maledetto', due to a curious anomaly

in the poster campaign: the full text reads "La bestia del castello maledetto nel film Sinfonia per un sadico" or "The beast of the cursed castle in the film Symphony for a Sadist". Evidently someone connected with the Italian release found 'Symphony for a Sadist' somewhat lacking and decide to give things a bit more exploitation sizzle. (It opened in Turin on 16 August 1965.)

**Problematica:** Some sources credit assistant director Enrique [Enrico] Bergier as playing the doctor. Similarly, some credit actor José Bastida although he isn't visible in any currently available prints.

**Press coverage:** The film attracted modest plaudits from *ABC Andalucía*: "*Jesús Franco has directed the story with undoubted skill, taking care that the movement of images and secondary details do not detract from the haunting facts narrated around the mysterious disappearance of attractive women, in an atmosphere and scenery at once suggestive and sinister.*"<sup>4</sup>

## RIFIFÍ EN LA CIUDAD (VOUS SOUVENEZ VOUS DE PACO?)

*Rififi in the City (Do you remember Paco?)*

**Spain, 1963**

Spanish depósito legal number: M.3215-1964 [on poster]

### Alternative titles

**Chasse à la mafia** (FR theatrical - Paris) *Hunting the Mafia*

**Vous souvenez vous de Paco?** (FR theatrical - provinces)

**Una spia sulla città** (IT theatrical) *A Spy over the City*

### Production company

**Albatros Film C.P.C.** (Madrid)

### Theatrical distributors

**CEPICSA** (Madrid)

**Compagnie Parisienne de Film** (Paris)

### Timeline

Shooting date	May-June	1963
French visa no. 27707 issued	13 April	1964
France premiere	22 April	1964
Madrid	07 December	1964
Barcelona	09 August	1965
Seville	01 March	1966
Italy (Rome) for one day	31 July	1967

### Theatrical running time

Spain	90m
France	117m

**Cast:** **Fernando Fernán Gómez** (Detective Sergeant Miguel Mora). **Jean Servais** (Maurice Leprince). **Laura Granados** (Pilar Mora). **Antonio Prieto** (Commissioner Vargas, Mora's superior). **Robert Manuel** (Puig). **María Vincent** (Nina Laverne). **Tomás de Molina**. **Dina Loy** (Juanita). **Agustín González** (Antonio Ribera). **Manuel Gas** (Juan Francisco 'Paco' Miralles). **Luis Marín** (Manolo, Juanita's friend). **Ángel Menéndez** (Mario Alonso, Leprince's secretary). **Serafín García Vázquez** (witness in hat at crash site). **Jacinto San Emeterio** (Majora, Leprince's lawyer). **Joaquín Pamplona** (Vargas' assistant seen interviewing black suspect). **Davidson Hepburn** (Chico Torres). **Greta Marcos** (Joya). **Antonio Giménez Escribano** (doctor). **Antonio Padilla** (Stardust head waiter). **Javier de Rivera** (Leprince's chiropodist). **[José Luis] Zalde** (Leprince's campaign manager). **Pilar Vela** (Juan's mother). **Lola [Lolita] del Pino**. **María Rosa Mallén**. **Blanquita Diwoney**. **Enrique Navarro** (Juan's mother's boyfriend). **Gonzalo Linares**. **José Castell**. **Emiliano Lizares** (Leprince's manservant). *uncredited:* **Rafael Hernández** (policeman at checkpoint). **Jess Franco** (client at Café Bolívar). **Guillermo Méndez** (moustachioed man at Puig's table at cabaret). **Gonzalo Esquiroz** (bearded soldier at Stardust).

**Credits:** director: **Jess Franco**, based on the novel *Vous souvenez-vous de Paco?* by Charles Exbrayat, adapted for the screen by **Jess Franco**, **Gonzalo Sebastián de Erice**, **Juan Cobos**. director of photography: **Godo [Godofredo] Pacheco**. editor: **Ángel Serrano**. art director: **Teddy [Tadeo] Villalba**. music: **Daniel J. White**. executive producer: **Pío Ballesteros**. producer: **José López-Brea**. associate producer: **Jess Franco**. production manager: **José Pedro Villanueva**. 1st assistant production: **José Salcedo**. 2nd assistant production: **Francisco Yagë**, **José Luis Lorente**. assistant director: **Gonzalo Sebastián de Erice**. continuity: **Lucía Martín**. camera operator: **Jorge Herrero**. focus puller: **Saturnino Pita**. camera assistant: **Jesús Giménez**. still photography: **Miguel Guzmán**. songs: **Jacques Mareuil**. assistant editors: **Maruja Soriano**, **Fely Rueda**. assistant art director: **Gumersindo Andrés**. set dresser: **Trino Martínez-Trives**. set construction: **Augusto Lega**. seamstress: **Ángelinas Castro**. make-up: **Emilio Puyol**. make-up assistant: **Mercedes Guillot**. choreography: **Héctor Zaraspe**. lighting equipment: **Yate**. props: **Mengíbar**. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid S.A.E.**. sound re-recording: **EXA**. sound system: **Westrex Recording System**. sound: **Felipe Fernández**. music recorded & released by **Phillips**.

**Synopsis:** *Menchoacan, Mexico: Juan Solano, a handsome young bartender at the Stardust Club, has disappeared. Det.-Sgt Miguel Mora had recently been employing him as a means to gain information about a man called Maurice Leprince, a powerful and influential politician with unsavoury criminal connections. A few days later, Juan's corpse is thrown through the front window of Mora's house. Mora wants to close the net on*

*Leprince but the politician looks set to win a major election and Mora's superior, Commissioner Vargas, is afraid to pursue the investigation. Mora confronts Leprince at the Stardust, but the meeting ends with him beaten up by Leprince's bodyguards and thrown into the sea. Rescued by two friends of Juan's, Juanita and Manolo, Mora recovers and, despite the advice of Pilar, his wife, decides to continue his investigation. Leprince's associates begin to turn up dead - first the sadistic Antonio Ribera, then ladies man Chico Torres, then old stalwart Miralles. Mora discovers that Leprince is involved in the drug trade throughout South America. Leprince, meanwhile, discovers that Juan had been having an affair with his girlfriend, Nina. Mora finally unmasks the mysterious assassin: it's Pilar, another of Juan's conquests. When Mora discovers her infidelity he shows her Juan's many love letters from other women, before walking out on her. Distraught, she follows, but crashes her car and dies. Mora, with nothing left to lose, goes to Leprince and confronts him at gunpoint. Leprince shoots Mora in the back. Commissioner Vargas arrives and shoots Leprince down.*

**Production notes:** *Rififi en la ciudad* began shooting in Malaga and Marbella in May 1963. It was subtitled 'Vous souvenez vous de Paco?', drawing attention to the French pulp novel by Charles Exbrayat from which it was derived. Press clippings from the period suggest that the film was being rushed ahead for release in July 1963,<sup>1</sup> however it failed to meet this deadline, perhaps due to the fact that while the film had been planned as a Spanish-French co-production Franco himself was forced to step in as associate producer when the French money failed to materialise. Despite this, French audiences saw the film first, under the title *Chasse à la mafia*, on 22 April 1964; its Madrid premiere followed on 7 December 1964.

**Review:** This elegant return to the film-noir territory of *La muerte silba un blues* is even more handsomely shot, and is probably Franco's strongest crime thriller. Godofredo Pacheco's black and white photography is stunning, and Franco responds to the skill of his hugely talented associate with a stream of beautiful and assured deep focus compositions. It's a must for anyone seeking evidence of the director's ability to create coherent and nuanced drama in a mainstream setting, and should raise a few appreciative eyebrows among those who generally regard his work as a technical shambles.

*Rififi en la ciudad* is Franco's first genuine literary adaptation (the novels of 'David Khune' excepted). The story is based on *Vous souvenez-vous de Paco?*, a pulp novel by French writer Charles Exbrayat, author of over a hundred detective stories many of which appeared in the very popular 'Le Masque' series. *Vous souvenez-vous de Paco?* was the winner of France's Grand Prix du Roman d'Aventures<sup>2</sup> in 1958, but, despite the credibility of the source, Franco's adaptation diverges considerably from the original.

In Exbrayat's book, the lead character (Inspector Miguel Lluji) joins the police with a single aim; to avenge his father, who was murdered by crime boss Ignacio Villar. After years of fruitless

searching he manages to infiltrate Villar's gang, using a young informer, Paco Volz. All seems well until Miguel receives a box delivered to his home: inside is Paco's head. From this point on, Villar finds that his associates are being bumped off. After each murder he receives the same message: "Do you remember Paco?".

Franco makes numerous changes to the book, the most profound of which is the removal of the lead character's motive for hunting down the villain. Detective Sergeant Mora in *Rififi en la ciudad* is nothing like Exbrayat's vengeful Inspector Lluji: he's simply a cop doing his job. The character of 'Paco' (called Juan in the film) is likewise altered. Instead of being Mora's innocent young protégé, risking his life on behalf of the police, he's portrayed as a philanderer who has slept with just about all the women in the film, many of them married, and in place of the cop's gnawing guilt for having caused the lad's death the film substitutes the forlorn, impotent rage of the cuckold. There's really very little of the emotional and psychological essence of the book left; Franco, with Gonzalo Sebastián de Erice and Juan Cobos, his co-writers on *The Sadistic Baron von Klaus*, has simply taken a rough outline of the plot and rewritten the characters. It scarcely seems worth having bought the rights in the first place - with just a little more tweaking the story would bear no relationship to the source at all.

Stylistically *Rififi en la ciudad* is a thing of beauty; narratively, however, it could do with more vitality. Like *La muerte silba un blues* it suffers from sluggish pacing, and despite being based on a pulp thriller it lacks the crude energy associated with the form. The moody film-noirs of the 1940s and 1950s evidently appealed to Franco, but he's a bit too casual with structure to bring off the dramatic peaks one would expect from this simultaneously downbeat and enthralling genre. Slow pacing in itself need not be a problem; it would soon become a significant aspect of Franco's mature directorial style, dovetailing perfectly with his taste for hypnotic erotica and horrific dream ambience. There's a difference, though, between slow pacing and no pacing. *Rififi en la ciudad* needs a foot on the accelerator as we approach the climax; instead we cruise at the same speed throughout, with no sense of urgency save for a couple of brief interjections, like the stalking of psychotic gang-member Ribera, or Pilar's fatal car crash. Slow talky scenes are included well into the final reel, by which time action, violence and dramatic confrontation should predominate.

The villain is another problem, and unlike *La muerte silba un blues* it's not so easy to blame the star. Jean Servais was a well-established French character actor with a string of prestigious assignments under his belt, and his face is quite interesting enough to hold our attention. The problem lies not with him, but with the paucity of action he's given. Although we understand that Maurice Leprince is a dangerous man, it's mostly because we're *told* about it. Much of the violence and evil for which he's responsible is carried out indirectly, as befits a man of power and influence (for instance, he orders his thugs to give Mora a savage beating). Nevertheless, he's supposed to be a gangland drug lord as well as a successful



politician; we need to see the colder, harder side of his personality, the monster beneath the facade. The scene in which he shoots dead his current squeeze, Nina, shows his ruthlessness, but even then he acts because Nina is betraying him, stealing incriminating papers from his safe. Leprince is reactive rather than proactive, and despite the murder of Ribera and Torres, we get no sense of counter-attack. Leprince is essentially acted *upon*; threatened on the telephone, betrayed by his moll, aggressively investigated by the police, and represented as a dangerous force solely by his thugs. Had he been a more baroque, extravagantly wicked character, an aggressor to be feared, the whole film would have been improved, slow pacing and all.

One last criticism concerns a mysterious voice-over at the beginning, eventually revealed to be from Mora's wife Pilar. Although Mora's investigation is the central thread of the storyline, it's somewhat displaced by having Pilar's thoughts echoing on the soundtrack. Surely any voice-over ought to emanate from the central character? I suppose you could argue that by giving Pilar the voice-over Franco is deliberately sidelining his investigative male lead, in a way that echoes Mora's displacement from his wife's affections. After all, Franco is clearly willing to undermine his emotionally glacial 'hero' elsewhere; Mora's injury halfway through the film results in him walking with a cane and a limp, a means of denoting emasculation drawn perhaps from Tennessee Williams. It's a dangerous tactic, though, in a film already leaning heavily towards listlessness and dissipation. Pilar may be granted the voice-over that is normally reserved for the leading character, but she's too sketchily drawn to gain centrality. With Leprince a reactive character, and Mora an emasculated one, and with Pilar left in the shadows, there's a kind of power leakage which reduces the dramatic impact.

Quite a list of complaints. However, Franco's strengths are also very much in evidence. By now we can sense the prevailing metabolism of his cinema: slow, almost slumberous rhythms, and a mood suffused with melancholy. *Rififi en la ciudad* includes several gorgeous sequences that eclipse reservations with their bewitching visual charms (rather as the women in Franco's later films distract men from asking awkward questions with their mesmeric sensuality). Nina sings her nightclub number, based around the infernally catchy melody that dominates the film, dazzlingly illuminated against a velvet black void. There follows a surrealistic performance involving dancers in medieval costumes, in which a man in a suit of armour 'gets down' with a girl in a bikini. Meanwhile, Mora receives a sustained and brutal beating in a shadowy stairwell at the hands of Leprince's most disturbed sidekick, a dancer called Antonio Ribera, played by Agustín González as a psychotic, sadistic homosexual. By intercutting the songs with the prolonged beating of the hero, Franco communicates a nonchalant sense of irony; in the modern world a brutal and primitive scenario plays out, while on stage medieval figures cavort with playful civility. He achieves a similar degree of irony by contrasting the hero's home –

a cold, shadowy, loveless place – with the light and eccentricity of the villain's abode, with its white walls, cane furniture, wild animal trophies, and live parakeets. A minor scene like the rendezvous between Nina and Detective Sergeant Mora which takes place at a public aquarium, becomes a display of lustrous lighting, gorgeous close-ups and stunning deep focus compositions. Dappled water reflections bounce off the walls as Nina (wearing the *most* eccentric hat) spills her guts about Leprince's role in Juan's murder, with turtles swimming surreally by in the background. The murder of Ribera is another outstanding sequence, consisting of multiple shots of the victim peering over his shoulder as he walks along a seafront causeway, before being attacked by a statuesque figure seen only in silhouette. (Incidentally, the identity of this figure is surely no mystery, although the story would have been better served if it were.) Ribera is the film's most energetically depraved character, a sadistic dandy whose tendency to lose his temper and clench his fists to his forehead whilst whining like a dog suggests serious psychological problems along the lines of Cody Jarrett in *White Heat*. We see him confidently cruising a man at the Stardust club and exuding a palpably twisted arousal as he beats Detective Mora, all of which makes him a far more intriguing and compelling villain than Leprince, who could have done with a bit of eccentricity or perversity. And then there's the car crash, which deploys Franco's grisliest shot so far, as Pilar's bleeding corpse stares sightlessly into the night amid an eerie tangle of glass and metal. It's an image that wouldn't be out of place in a Dario Argento film.

Perhaps the most striking thing about *Rififi en la ciudad* is the fact that it was made at all. Corrupt politician Maurice Leprince, with his omnipresent 'Big Brother is watching you' posters on every street and TV screen, seems such a pointed attack on the cult of personality around General Franco that it's a wonder the film wasn't cut off at the knees before reaching production. Such had already been the fate of one Franco project ('Los colgados'): *Rififi* could so easily have ended up just another unrealised ambition. However, the ambiguity of the story's geographical setting was enough to guide it safely past the state censor's beady eye. Future films would bring Franco into conflict with the Spanish censor due to their eroticism; political sensitivities would thus give way to moral issues. One of his strongest movies away from the twin beacons of sex and violence, *Rififi en la ciudad* suggests a different direction Franco could have taken: political critique couched in the seductive language of film noir.

A final note on the setting: a newspaper report about Ribera's murder names the location as Menchoacán (an alternative name for Michoacán) in South-Western Mexico. Under the headline "Dancer murdered in Menchoacan" the article reads, "On the bridge leading to the salt mines of Santa Clara was found the corpse of the famous dancer Antonio Ribera." There is indeed a small settlement called Santa Clara in Mexico, near the Michoacán-Guanajuato border. And yet Leprince is running for the 'senate' and refers to being accepted as an American citizen. His campaign posters are



in Spanish but there's a large black community and a jazz milieu in the region. Is this really set in Mexico? New Mexico? Somewhere else in Spanish-speaking South America? Interestingly, Michoacán is traversed by the Sierra Madre, and is mentioned in B. Traven's *The Tigress* and *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*; it's safe to assume that Franco was very familiar with Traven's work (remember, he had tried to mount a production of *The Rebellion of the Hanged* a year earlier) so perhaps Michoacán had stuck in Franco's mind after reading his stories?

**Franco on screen:** Franco is seen in profile, directly beside the camera, during the Café Bolívar sequence.

**Cast and crew:** Leading man Fernando Fernán Gómez, here looking remarkably like American actor Karl Malden, was by this time a well established actor and director of comedies. In 1964 he directed *El extraño viaje*, in which Franco made a rare acting appearance outside of his own work. Gómez later turned up in such major Spanish films as *Spirit of the Beehive* (1973) and *All About My Mother* (1999) and was married for seven years to the much younger Spanish actress Emma Cohen, star of Jess Franco's extraordinary 1973 psychological thriller *Al otro lado del espejo*. He died in 2007 ... The big name in the cast is Jean Servais, Belgian star of the superlative crime classic *Rififi* (directed in France by the blacklisted American director Jules Dassin in 1955). His presence explains the entirely spurious title of Franco's production, which attempts to associate itself with the French hit much as various 1970s productions would borrow the name 'Emmanuelle' for commercial gain ... Davidson Hepburn, the handsome black actor playing Chico Torres, one of Leprince's heavies, is now the heavily decorated Davidson L. Hepburn Ph.D. OBE, Chevalier of the French Legion d'Honneur and President of the General Conference of UNESCO between 2009-2011. Fluent in Spanish and French, he attained his Ph.D. in Comparative Language and Literature at the University of Madrid, Spain in 1966, which puts him on the ground at the right place and time, and with the right language skills. The same man is also renowned for his voice talents: he won a Golden Globe award for narration at the International Film Festival in 1983 and is apparently still sought after for TV and radio commercials, narrations and documentaries. (Incidentally, just as in *La muerte silba un blues*, note that Franco once again depicts, without comment, a black character in an inter-racial relationship).

**Music:** Buoyed along by Daniel White's marvellous Latino jazz score, *Rififi en la ciudad* also features contributions from French jazz singer Marie [Maria] Vincent, who plays Leprince's girlfriend Nina. Born in Marseilles on October 23, 1936, she dubbed Brigitte Bardot for the songs in *The Lighthouse-Keeper's Daughter* (1952) and was winner of the Edith Piaf Award in 1950.

**Locations:** The aquarium rendezvous between Nina and Mora was shot at the Acuarium Madrid; other scenes were shot at the Museo Nacional de Ciencias Naturales. Seaside location shooting took place in Málaga and Marbella.

**Studio:** Estudios Ballesteros (Madrid).

**Connections:** The word 'Rififi' is considered untranslatable, the closest anyone can agree upon being some variant of 'rough and tumble', or 'rumble' in the sense of a fight between men ... *Rififi en la ciudad* bears no relation at all to Jules Dassin's classic 1955 heist movie *Rififi*, except for the casting of Jean Servais. Further 'Rififi' films were dotted throughout the 1950s and 1960s, sometimes but not always based on the writings of Auguste Le Breton, whose book was the source for Dassin's movie. Among the bona fide adaptations were *Du rififi chez les femmes* (Alex Joffé, 1959) starring Robert Hossein, *Rififi à Tokyo* (Jacques Deray, 1963) which staged a bank hold-up and diamond robbery in, you guessed it, Tokyo, and *Du rififi à Paname* aka *Rififi in Paris* (Denys de La Patellière, 1966) which starred Jean Gabin ... *Rififi en la ciudad*'s voice-over emanates from a woman who does not survive the film - shades of *Sunset Boulevard* (1950)?

**Other versions:** Despite the French finance falling through, the film was released twice in France, once in Paris as *Chasse à la Mafia* and again in the provinces as *Vous souvenez vous de Paco?*. The film also played in Italy as *Una spia sulla città*. Something that has not been remarked upon before is that Juan's love letters and the threatening notes from the killer, which are held up to the camera for several seconds, are written in English. This would suggest that at some point an English language version of *Rififi en la ciudad* was struck, although sadly it has yet to be unearthed.

**Problematica:** Contrary to many sources, Angel Menéndez plays Mario Alonso (Leprince's butler) and not 'Phineas Cabot'. Similarly Francisco Braña appears as a Stardust Club client and not 'Mario Alonso'. Some of the character names are different in the French-dubbed version: Lori Mora is Pilar Mora, Puig is Robert Adams, Antonio Ribera is Griffin and Manolo is Chiks. The Italian poster adds the cast name 'Antony Stemberg', presumably a pseudonym for one of the Spanish actors.

**Press coverage:** In Barcelona, *Rififi en la ciudad* was warmly received, with one critic declaring it: "An entertaining film in the police genre, ably directed by Jesús Franco. The different episodes take place in a well depicted atmosphere of corruption, with music halls and crime dens in which bright and sordid effects are skillfully combined. The only problem with the dramatic development of the narrative is a series of passages related to the reactions of the main characters that require an extraordinary imaginative effort from the viewer. Despite this, the film continues to engage due to the director's ability to maintain a precise and expressive rhythm in the action."<sup>3</sup> ABC Madrid were less enamoured, declaring it a film of "very mediocre temperature", mocking Franco's attempt to pass off Spanish locations as the tropics, and declaring the whole enterprise: "a cautious and confusing work that echoes without innovation the sounds of many similar works, but without resonance or ambition. There is a special taste in the work of Jesus Franco for claustrophobic and gloomy framing - a delinquent pleasure for those dark dramatic shots that on their own say very little when you do not put behind them a more intensive counterpoint of rhythm and vibrancy."<sup>4</sup>



# EL LLANERO

*The Plainsman*

Country of origin: **Spain [& France]** 1963

Spanish depósito légal number: M.15960-1963

French visa number: 28688

## Alternative titles

**Le Jaguar** (FR theatrical) *The Jaguar*

**Sfida selvaggia** (IT theatrical) *Challenge of the Wild*

## Production companies

**Sociedad Anónima Big 4** (Madrid)

**Eurociné** (Paris)

## Theatrical distributors

**Hispanex Films, S.A.** (Madrid)

**Sopadis** ('une sélection Georges Estin de Eurocinéac') (Paris)

## Timeline

Shooting date	late-September to Oct	1963
Seville premiere	16 May	1964
France	21 October	1964
Italy (Turin)	30 December	1965
French visa issued	04 April	1967
Madrid & Barcelona		No release

## Theatrical running time

Spain	90m
France	97m

**Cast:** **José Suarez** (José Mendoza, 'The Jaguar'). **Silvia [Sylvia] Sorrente** (Lolita). **Georges Rollin** (Colonel don Fernando Saltilerra). **Roberto Camardiel** (Juano). **Manuel Zarzo** (Carlos, 'El Caronte'). **Todd Martin** [as 'Todd Martens'] (Lieutenant Alberto Kalman). **Roberto Font** (Father Francisco). **Marta Reves** (Inés Saltilerra). **Félix Dafauce** (Colonel Mendoza). **María Vico** (Marina, Saltilerra's housekeeper). **Xan das Bolas** (Saltilerra officer in straw hat). **Beny [Beni] Deus** (Saltilerra officer on horseback). **Los Machucambos [Julia Cortes, Rafaél Gayoso, Romano Zanotti]** (revolutionary band). **Alicia Altabella**. **Elsa Zabala** (Mendoza's wife). **Guillermo Méndez** (laughing Mendoza bandit with moustache). **Albertina Escobar**. **Francisco Serrano** (gentleman card player). **Rafael Hernández**. \* **José Riesgo**. \* **Mike Brendel** (Carlo, hangman). **Guillermo Vera** (young Mendoza bandit). **Antonio Padilla** (older sentry). **Tito García** (bearded card player). **Antonio G. Cara** (José Mendoza as a child). *uncredited:* **Emilio Gutiérrez Caba** (Mendoza's older son). *French version recorded with the voices of* Jacques Bauchey, René Berthier, Gérard Buhr, Bernard Charlan,

Sylviane Daubry, Jacqueline Ferrière, Sophie Leclair, Christiane Vallon. [\*credited onscreen but not visible in any available prints.]

*Credits:* director: **Jess Franco**. story: **David Khunne**. screenplay & dialogue: **Nicole David & Jess Franco**. director of photography: **Emilio Foriscot**. editor: **Ángel Serrano**. art director: **Tony [Antonio] Cortés**. music: **Daniel J. White**. production: **Julián Esteban**. production manager: **Francisco Romero**. 1st assistant production: **Julio Parra**. 2nd assistant production: **José G. Álvarez**. continuity: **Flora Álvarez [del Valle]**. camera operator: **Jorge Herrero**. 1st camera assistant: **Pedro Martín**. 2nd camera assistant: **Eduardo Pérez**. still photography: **César Benítez**. assistant editor: **Basi [Basilia] Soriano**. costumes designer: **Tony [Antonio] Cortés**. seamstress: **Esperanza Luzón**. wardrobe: **Humberto Cornejo**. make-up & hair: **Paloma Fernández**. make-up assistant: **María de Elena**. electrical equipment: **C.A.I.S.A.**. set furnishings: **Lega Michelena, S.A.**. props: **Luna, Mateos y Mengibar**. footwear: **Pedro Borja**. horses: **Tomás Cicuendez**. filmed in **TotalScope**. laboratory: **Fotofilm** (Madrid) **S.A.E.**. sound re-recording: **Fono España**. sound system: **Westrex Recording System**. sound engineers: **Jesús Jiménez, Paulino García Velázquez**. music publisher: **"Carrousel"** (Paris). soundtrack released on **Decca Records**. *French version* post-synchronisation by **S.I.C.**: artistic and technical director: **J.P. Menard**; editors: **Alain Baudry, Pierre Machu**; sound recordist: **Jean Rouat**. sound recording: **Studio Fox**. titles: **G.T.C. (Joinville-le-Pont)** [FR prints]. *uncredited:* French co-producer: **Marius Lesoeur**.

**Synopsis:** *Venezuela, 1863. As the civil war rages, Colonel Saltilerra attacks the villa of wealthy landlord Mendoza and kills everyone. Only Mendoza's little son José survives, saved by a servant named Juano. Years later, Saltilerra has become the region's governor, while José (nicknamed "Jaguar") has become a bandit. He fights against the usurpers with a group of followers – including Juano – from a secret hide-out. Receiving information from his girlfriend Lolita, a tavern singer, the Jaguar and his men assault a military cargo of gold coins, which he distributes to the poor. Carlos, one of the Jaguar's men, is arrested when Saltilerra's right hand man, Kalman, finds him in possession of stolen coins. He's beaten and tortured, but the Jaguar and Juano help him escape and hide him in Father Francisco's church. Kalman and his men break into the church and arrest Carlos and Francisco, who are sentenced to death: however, the Jaguar saves them on the gallows. The Jaguar is in love with the governor's daughter Inés, who has been promised by her father to Kalman. When José hears about Inés' wedding he goes mad. Juano leaves the Jaguar's camp to meet Inés, but returns mortally wounded. Before dying, Juano tells his godson the truth about his family. Inés sends the Jaguar a message, inviting him to flee with her, but Kalman intercepts it and sets up a trap. The Jaguar is rescued by his men and a battle ensues, during which Inés is mortally wounded. Saltilerra is shot by Carlos, and after a fierce duel, José kills Kalman. The Jaguar gives his land to the poor and leaves, accompanied by his companions and the faithful Lolita.*



*Colonel Saltierra (Georges Rollin) leads his men into a town decimated by civil war, in El Llanero.*

**Production notes:** Shooting for five weeks from late September 1963, *El Llanero* was Franco's only contribution to the Western genre. It first appeared in Seville's cinema listings on 16 May 1964, with a press review published the day after. As *Le Jaguar* it was briefly distributed in France, where it opened in October 1964.

**Julian Grainger's review:** Spain had been used as an attractive and versatile location by the American studios since the early 1950s. Large-scale pictures such as *Alexander the Great* (1955), *The Pride and the Passion* (1957), *Solomon and Sheba* (1959) and *John Paul Jones* (1959)<sup>1</sup> as well as of course the mighty *El Cid* (1961) and *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) took advantage of Spain's varied landscapes and near-endless sunshine. The further south you venture, the more arid it becomes and the poorer the inhabitants. In short, labour was cheap. In early 1958 Raoul Walsh had shot location scenes for his comedy western *The Sheriff of Fractured Jaw* on the Castilian Plains and in 1961 Michael Carreras took a brief sabbatical from Hammer to team up with José Maesso's Madrid-based firm Tecisa to film *The Savage Guns* (*Tierra brutal*, 1961) on location in the Andalusian province of Almería in southeastern Spain. Reputedly Europe's driest area, Almería could give Arizona a run for its money for rocks and dust and the bright sunshine meant minimal lighting, rapid set-ups and a shorter shooting schedule.

Spanish producers of popular fare began to take notice: Spanish locations offered the prospect of local, and thus cheap, film-making. Furthermore, Spain's dreadful exchange rate meant that a dollar went a long way once converted into pesetas. Just as importantly, European audiences had a thirst for westerns that was no longer being quenched by the American studios. With the odd exception, westerns had fled American screens in search of the cathode ray and it was now the networks who were keeping the genre alive. US series often took years to reach foreign shores and of course they needed to be dubbed into Spanish, French or whatever language was necessary. One series that was screening weekly on Spanish television in 1963 was *El llanero solitario* - the Spanish title of the enormously popular Clayton Moore-Jay Silverheels series *The Lone Ranger* (1949-1957).

Spanish producer-writer Eduardo Manzanos Brochero formed his Madrid-based film cooperative Copercines and sprang into production in 1961 with two projects directed by the experienced Ramón Torrado: the first - *Ella y los veteranos* - was a comedy, and the second, *Fray Escoba*, a religious biopic starring popular singer René Muñoz, achieved critical success but was seen by fewer than 1,500 cinema-going Spaniards. Manzanos needed more films and shouldering the entire cost of production was risky to say the least. However there were other European producers who had found themselves in the same financially-insecure position and Manzanos had working relationships with both Emo Bistolfi (and his homonymous Cineproduzione Emo Bistolfi) of Rome and Marius Lesoeur of Eurociné in Paris. Lesoeur had already

worked with such Spanish producers as Miguel Mezquiriz (*La melodía misteriosa* (1956) and *Delincuentes* (1957) - both directed by Crimson's Juan Fortuny) and the prolific Barcelona-based Ignacio F. Iquino (1958's *Cuatro en la frontera*) before teaming up with Sergio Newman's company Hispamer for Franco's *La reina del Tabarin* and *Vampiresas* 1930. Manzanos, with assistance and filming guarantees from Bistolfi and Lesoeur, built a western set in Hoyo de Manzanares, located some 25 miles from Madrid, and nicknamed it 'Golden City'. This was another financial risk - a standing set constructed just for westerns (and similar genres). The first feature to utilise Golden City was a co-production with Bistolfi entitled *El sheriff terrible*, filmed in the summer of 1962, swiftly followed by two films directed by Joaquín Romero Marchent: *Cabalgando hacia la muerte* (*El Zorro*) (aka *The Shadow of Zorro*) and *Tres hombres buenos* (aka *The Implacable Three*) while Hispamer rented out the set for *Las tres espadas del Zorro* (aka *The Three Swords of Zorro*). By the summer of 1963 it was clear that Golden City was a going concern.

The early- and mid-sixties might well be termed Franco's 'director-in-search-of-a-career' phase. With a period melodrama, a youth comedy, an action-adventure, a couple of crime films and a brace of horror items under his belt, an attempt at an outdoors/adventure film might have seemed like the next genre to try out. With the Zorro titles popular in both European and South American cinemas and *The Lone Ranger* (*El llanero solitario*) scoring on television, it was perhaps inevitable that enterprising film producers would latch onto similar characters. Mexico had its vaqueros and charros, Argentina and Brazil their gauchos, the Peruvians their pijaenos and morochucos and Venezuela and Colombia had 'El llanero' - The Plainsman, the name derived from the *Llanos* grasslands.

The screenplay for *El Llanero*, credited both to Franco and his then-wife Nicole, is explicitly political: the Federal War or 'Guerra Federal' was a bloody civil war - Venezuela's first since independence in 1821 - between the land-owning, politically dominant conservative party, and the liberal party who were looking for greater autonomy for the provinces. Colonel Saltierra's character belongs to the former grouping; a war criminal who slaughtered Mendoza and his clan for its wealth and turned this into political power by becoming the region's (deeply corrupt) governor. Mendoza's son José, now an adult, has become 'El Llanero' or 'Le Jaguar' (depending on whether you're Spanish or French), who intends both to bring down Saltierra and his cronies as well as to re-distribute his ill-gotten gains amongst the poor and needy. The finale sees Mendoza give away his lands to the poor before leaving with his surviving compatriots, presumably to right more wrongs.

Another of the film's major concerns is the idea of family: the early scenes featuring Mendoza and his family (before the arrival of Saltierra and his men) are portrayed as idyllic and safe, as personified by cuddly Spanish actor Roberto Camardiel as José's



'nanny'. (Camardiel does indeed go on to save the infant José from certain death.) In purely narrative terms, José hopes to find a family to replace the ruin of his own but has the misfortune to fall for his arch-enemy's daughter, the pretty-but-prim Inés. She, of course, must die and it's noticeable that José will finally leave with (sexy) saloon singer Juanita.

The casting of José Suárez as the title character is no coincidence either: at the time (and for many years) Suárez was the president of Spain's left-leaning actors union held within the Sindicato del Espectáculo. When shooting began in late September 1963, leading man Suárez, a more mature, hyper-masculine actor, had recently celebrated his 44th birthday.

Future Franco film producer Julián Esteban's company Sociedad Anónima Big 4 appears to have made no other films, however a fascinating article on the growth of westerns filmed in Spain published in *Variety* noted that Marius Lesoeur and Eduardo Manzano had begun shooting *The Plainsmen* "last week".<sup>2</sup> This is curious given that a credit for Manzano's Copercines is nowhere to be found on the film itself. The suggestion is that parts of *El Llanero* were filmed on the Golden City set at Hoyo de Manzanares as part of the deal between Manzanos and Lesoeur, one given credence when *Le Jaguar* was released to French cinemas in 1965 as 'une sélection Georges Estin de Eurocinéac'. Eurocinéac was a subsidiary of Lesoeur's Eurociné for distribution of its genre product (i.e. EurocinéAction)<sup>3</sup> and it would go on to release *El secreto del Doctor Orloff* in France as *Les Maîtresses du docteur Jekyll*.

There has been some debate as to whether *El Llanero* can properly be called a western. In the broadest possible terms, westerns are concerned principally with concepts such as honour and vengeance and often feature a single character seeking justice for himself. In contrast, characters such as Zorro and The Lone Ranger<sup>4</sup> are more concerned with social justice and aim to bring down the corrupt wealthy and powerful. The wearing of a mask could be viewed as sinister in contrast to a short-haired, clean-faced, All-American cowboy but thanks perhaps to the tremendous influence of Superman, the (decidedly skimpy) masks worn by Zorro and the Ranger are used to protect their identity and provide for the safety of their loved ones rather than feature as concealment for any nefarious deeds they might carry out.

**Stephen Thrower's review:** Arguably the duller Jess Franco film of the 1960s, this disappointing quasi-Western with echoes of the Zorro story is a run-of-the-mill 'oater' that fails to quicken the pulse. Franco was never to return to the genre, perhaps because, as his career developed, he grew less and less interested in male characters (the chief concern of the Western). Certainly, despite its occasionally handsome photography, *El Llanero* resides in one of the most obscure and unloved corners of the Franco filmography, lacking both the sexual charge and the macabre frisson of his major work. Set in Venezuela but filmed in Southern Spain, it concerns an outlaw who fights corrupt and violent government forces and steals

for the poor whilst tracking down those who murdered his parents. Doggedly old-fashioned but lacking the heroic ballast needed to make the clichés work, it's ultimately neither fish nor fowl; it has neither the naive conviction of a conventional adventure story, nor the irony and excess of the soon-to-be-minted Spaghetti Westerns (Ricardo Blasco's *Duello nel Texas* was made the same year and Leone's *A Fistful of Dollars* followed in 1964).

Having already hopped from comedy to musical to horror to thriller, Franco, rather like Quentin Tarantino in years to come, was evidently keen to try his hand at every genre, but he shows zero aptitude for Westerns. In fact one could go further and say that he doesn't really 'get' heroic fiction at all. He has no real investment in heroes; heroines and anti-heroes yes, and anti-heroines most certainly! *El Llanero*, however, concerns a four-square heroic archetype, the outlaw bandit with right on his side. The film appears devoid of irony and thus Franco seems disengaged. Consider, for example, the way in which the hero is introduced. We meet him twenty minutes into the film – if 'meet' is the right word. Franco observes him via a prolonged medium shot that refuses to 'mosey on down' and look the great man in the face. There are no heroic close-ups, and no thrilling action set-pieces to introduce him: apart from the prologue in which he's just a small child, the first we see of him he's just a nondescript cowboy sitting around a camp fire, and before you reach for avant-garde theorising to defend Franco's directorial choice, sorry, I'm not buying. This is no 'deconstruction of the heroic archetype', it's simply the result of flat and uninteresting direction.

The hero's girlfriend Lolita, played by Sylvia Sorrente, is far more to the director's taste. To begin with, we see her execute a daring burglary, stealing government papers revealing that a stagecoach carrying a large sum of money is due to pass by. Scaling a twenty foot wall and dodging guards like a Venezuelan Emma Peel, she rivets Franco's camera; the nominal masculine hero comes a very distant second, like a tired old donkey struggling to keep up with a thoroughbred mare. Sadly Lolita plays only a secondary role, so the rest of *El Llanero* barely breaks into a canter. A few attempts at wry humour feel half-hearted, a torture scene peters out with nary a flesh wound, and when the only respite from tedium comes in the form of a few South American folk songs you know you're in trouble. As the eponymous righter of wrongs, José Suarez is a dud, and villain of the piece Georges Rollin makes even less of a mark than he did in *La muerte silba un blues*. Sorrente's catlike features and edgy Barbara Steele demeanour are probably all you'll remember afterwards. Except for her, *El Llanero* is that rare thing; a Franco film that deserves its persistent low profile.

**Cast and crew:** Despite her obvious talents, Sylvia Sorrente had a surprisingly short career in film. Her most notable roles were in a mildly salacious early film by erotic pioneer José Bénazéraf called *L'Éternité pour nous* (1963), Antonio Margheriti's ravishingly lovely Gothic chiller *Castle of Blood* (1964), and Georges Lautner's colourful and energetic crime parody *Ne nous fâchons pas* (1967).

José Suarez was a familiar face to Spanish cinema-goers, having played Spain's first Zorro in *La montaña sin ley* (1953). He'd also worked with Juan Antonio Bardem (*Calle mayor*, 1956) and after *El Llanero* went on to appear in Westerns for Ferdinando Baldi (*Texas Addio*, 1966; *Forgotten Pistolero*, 1969) and Tonino Valerii (*A Reason to Live, A Reason to Die*, 1972).

**Music:** Daniel White's score broods magnificently over the opening credits, but it would better suit a Gothic horror tale. The Latin-American music in the film is provided by those bearded roustabouts 'Los Machucambos', stars of many a 'Phase 4' easy-listening and 'exotica' LP in the 1960s and 1970s.

**Locations:** The Sierra de Madrid mountain range (Spain); Southern Spain, somewhere between Almeria and Jaén.

**Studio:** 'Golden City' (Hoyo de Manzanares, Madrid, Spain).

**Connections:** The script for *El Llanero* is credited to Franco and 'Nicole David' aka Nicole Guettard, Franco's first wife. Pproducer Julian Esteban, later the majordomo of J.E. Films, would work with Franco again in the early 1980s, producing the better of his two cannibal movies, *Devil Hunter*, his mesmeric study of lust and betrayal, *Aberraciones sexuales de una mujer casada*, and his hallucinatory erotic drama *Eugénie Historia de una perversion*.

**Problematica:** Some sources credit Jess Franco with an appearance but he isn't visible in the available Spanish, French or Italian prints. This, and the presence on the Spanish credits of two actors (Rafael Hernández and José Riesgo) who do not appear in any extant version, suggests a longer version yet to be discovered.

**Press coverage:** The reviewer for *ABC Andalucía* took a very positive view: "*Jesús Franco offers a film of singular attractions within the "western" lineage, with Spanish actors and professional resources. [He] has committed to film a story of a strong emotional character, and fully developed the action without stinting on violence, romantic drama or matters of honor ... Emilio Foriscot's photography, and Angel Serrano's editing are outstanding.*"<sup>5</sup>

## DR. ORLOFF'S MONSTER

Spain [& France] 1964

French visa number: 30928

Original theatrical title in country of origin

**El secreto del doctor Orloff**

Alternative titles

**El secreto del dr. Orloff** (SP admat)

**Les Maîtresses du docteur Jekyll** (FR theatrical)

*The Mistresses of Doctor Jekyll*

**Les Maîtresses du Dr Jekyll** (FR theatrical poster)

**Le amanti del Dr. Jekyll** (IT theatrical) *The Lovers of Dr. Jekyll*  
**Dr. Jekyll's Mistresses** (UK DVD)

**As Amantes do Dr. Jekyll** (POR DVD) *The Lovers of Dr. Jekyll*

Production companies

**Leo Films** (Spain)

**Eurociné** (Paris)

Theatrical distributors

**Nueva Films, S.A.** (Madrid)

**Eurocinéac** (Paris)

Timeline

Shooting date	February	1964
new footage (FR version)		1965
Barcelona premiere	23 February	1965
French visa issued	15 October	1965
France	17 November	1965
USTV screening (Kansas)	2 April	1966
Italy (Arezzo)	31 May	1966
Seville	01 October	1966

Theatrical running time

Spain	89m
France	91m

**Cast:** Agnes Spaak (Melissa, Professor Fisherman's niece). **José Rubio** (Juan Manuel). **Perla Cristal** (Rosa, cabaret singer). **Pastor Serrador** (Inspector Díaz). **Marcelo Arroita-Jáuregui** (Professor Conrad Fisherman). **Daniel Blumer** (Carlos Serrano, Rosa's pimp). **Juan Antonio Soler** (Siegfried, a witness). **Magda Maldonado** (Rosa's friend). **Manuel Guitián** (Cicero, Fisherman's valet). **Mer Casas**. **Marta Reves**. **Hugo Blanco** (Andros Fisherman). **Luisa Sala** (Aunt Ingrid, Conrad's wife). **Julio Infiesta** (policeman who shoots at Andros in nightclub). **Ramón Lillo** (Emilio, policeman with information about Serrano). **Ángela Plá** (opium den client). **José Truchado** (policeman investigating necklaces). **Milagros Guijarro** (Mrs. Orloff). **Francisco René** (cop with thin moustache and trilby). **Guillermo Carmona**. **Rafael Hernández** (nightclub witness to Andros shooting). **Luis Rico**. **Maribel Hidalgo** (first victim [Spanish/US version]). **Julia Taboso [Toboso]**. **Javier [de] Rivera** (Dr. Orloff). **Pedro Fenollar** (Lang, section technician). **Emilio [García] Doménech**. **Ricardo Ojeda**. *uncredited:* **Jesús Franco** (Frieda's nightclub band pianist). **Guillermo Méndez** (man leaning on stairs at cabaret). *French version recorded with the voices of* **Monique Morisi**, **Renée Régnard**, **Hubert Buthion**, **Sady Rebot**, **Julien Loisel**.

**Credits:** director: **Jess Franco**. story, screenplay & dialogue by **Nicole Franco [Guettard]** & **Jess Franco**; based on a novel by

**David Khüne** [FR prints only]. director of photography: **Alfonso Nieva**. editor: **Ángel Serrano**. art direction & set dressing: **José María de la Guerra**. music: **Daniel White**. production manager: **Fernando Somoza**. assistant production: **Julio Parra**. assistant director: **Jaime Jesús Balcázar**. continuity: **Flora Álvarez del Valle**. camera operator: **Jorge Herrero**. focus puller: **Luis Muñoz Alcolea**. still photography: **Tomás Fernández Jr.** original songs performed by **Perla Cristal** written by **Fernando García Morcillo**. assistant editor: **Basi [Basilia] Soriano**. assistant art director: **José Antonio de la Guerra y de La Paz**. set construction: **Tomás Fernández**. property master: **Augusto Pérez**. make-up: **José Echevarría**. 1st make-up assistant: **Pilar Echevarría**. 2nd make-up assistant: **Amelia de los Reyes**. special effects: **Castro**. electrical equipment: **José Pernas**. wardrobe: **Peris Hermanos**. props: **Mateos & Mengibar**. laboratory: **Madrid Film**. sound engineer: **Jesús Giménez**. dubbing studios: **Fono España**. dubbing director: **Rafael [de] Penagos**. music publisher: **France-Record**. *French version* post-synchronised at **Studios Kléber (Paris)**; adaptation & dubbing director: **André Norévo**; sound recordist: **R. St.Martin**. titles: **G.T.C.** *English version* dialogue: **InterVox**. recorded at: **Fono España**. uncredited producers: **Leo Lax**, **Marius Lesoeur**.

**Synopsis:** *Melissa, a pretty young Austrian student, travels to the town of Holfen to spend the Christmas holidays with her Aunt and Uncle, Inglud and Conrad Fisherman. Having missed the bus, she meets Manuel, a good-looking young Spaniard, who offers to drive her there and flirts with her during the journey. By the time he drops her off at her destination, the two have become friends and arrange to meet up again. At the Fisherman household the mood is oppressive: Uncle Conrad is cold and incommunicative while Aunt Inglud is a bitter, miserable lush. The two clearly hate each other, and their live-in servant Cicero is a giggling lunatic who seems to do almost nothing. The root of the Fishermans' dysfunctional relationship is revealed: one night, the year Melissa was born, Conrad caught Inglud in bed with his younger brother Andros, Melissa's father. Enraged, Conrad killed him, and with the help of theories learned from a certain Dr. Orloff managed to awaken him as a walking cadaver enslaved by radio control. Conrad now uses Andros to kill various women, mainly nightclub strippers, with whom he has been dallying. One night Melissa is confronted by the re-animated Andros, whom she recognises as her father from the sole picture she has of him. The shock sends her into a faint. Conrad uses her collapse as an excuse to forbid Manuel to see her. Nevertheless, the two lovers make contact and Melissa informs Manuel that something is terribly wrong at the Fisherman household. That night, Andros escapes and goes on the run, with Conrad and Cicero in pursuit. Andros [...commits yet another murder in the Spanish version, then...] heads for the cemetery, where he gazes at his own grave. Conrad recaptures him, and then makes him kill again. After visiting Inglud in her room, causing her to die of shock, Andros attacks Manuel, who has forced entry to the castle to protect Melissa. Before he can kill the young man, the police arrive and Andros flees into the night. At dawn Melissa must confront her father and decide whether to help him escape, or lure him to his death...*

**Production notes:** In a Spanish press interview on 26 January 1964, glamorous Argentinian actress Perla Cristal revealed that she was about to begin work on her third film for Jesús Franco, *El secreto del doctor Orloff*, on 28 January.<sup>1</sup> Joining her two weeks later, on 10 February, was her co-star José Rubio. *El secreto del doctor Orloff* opened in Barcelona on 23 February 1965.<sup>2</sup>

**Review:** Often portrayed as a mere footnote to *The Awful Dr. Orloff*, this second 'Orloff' film has charms very much of its own. It's a beautiful, dreamy work that flits between melancholy and horror, and though it may be quite messy in construction it's nevertheless distinctive, entertaining, and full of memorable images. True it presents some formidable absurdities, with narrative ellipses bordering on the wilfully obtuse, but the emotional tenor of the piece, a haunting mood of sorrow tinged with the paradoxical warmth of a Christmas ghost story, lingers pleasingly in the mind. Personally I find it to be one of the two or three most enjoyable Franco films of the 1960s.

Things get off to a great start with shots of Hugo Blanco and Marcelo Arroita-Jauregui, artfully posed in deep shadow, staring at the camera radiating silent trauma. The effect is reminiscent of Ingmar Bergman's early 1960s films (or Bava's *Blood and Black Lace*), but while the promise of Scandinavian psychodrama à la Franco may have some of you salivating, it's best to treat this as an accidental treat and move on; what we have is simply a delightfully odd little horror tale, and none the worse for it.

Though the original Spanish title *El secreto del Doctor Orloff* and the English-language title *Dr. Orloff's Monster* seem to promise a sequel to *The Awful Dr. Orloff*, in truth the links are slight. For a start, while the first film took place in 1912, *Dr. Orloff's Monster* is set in the 1960s. In addition, the new Doctor Orloff, who appears only twice in the film, is a very different fellow, and not just because he's added an extra 'f' to his surname. Consulted on his sickbed by the film's true villain, Professor Conrad Fisherman, he discloses a vital secret out of misguided friendship and trust. "You're ambitious, yet you're a dedicated genius. You're not an unscrupulous madman," he murmurs to his colleague. In truth, however, Fisherman is a vengeful, maladjusted fruit-loop who shouldn't be trusted with scissors, never mind the secret of how to control a reanimated cadaver. This elderly Orloff has lost his forebear's sharpened wits; the original may have been a psychopath, but at least he was nobody's fool.

*Dr. Orloff's Monster* begins carving its own identity when depicting the Fisherman household. Fisherman himself is a callous, self-absorbed patriarch, consumed with anger and resentment. He lives in a beautiful bijou castle, but in spite of the elegant medievalism of the property the atmosphere inside is stifling and deathly. Neither he nor his alcoholic wife Inglud (yes that really is her name) can conceal their mutual loathing. He's cold and supercilious, she's a drunken mess. Portrayed amusingly, if broadly, by Luisa Sala, Inglud is depressed,







hysterical, and self-indulgently catty, a refugee from a Tennessee Williams play. "He's playing the tragedian tonight," she sneers to her recently arrived niece, the sweet and innocent Melissa, as Conrad muses on mortality over supper. Meanwhile the couple's only servant, Cicero, is a giggling, capering old flake who picks up on the degenerate mood and runs with it, joking that the dust in the place is too thick to be bothered with cleaning: "*The more I let it go the less I feel like sweeping it!*"

Staffing problems and marital discord may be out in the open, but there's a terrible secret hidden away on the top floor: namely Andros, Melissa's dead father, reanimated by Fisherman for use as a radio-controlled assassin. Andros is a fascinating 'monster' whose sorry existence is the real horror of the story; a tormented zombie forced to commit acts of murderous brutality by the bitter younger brother he once cuckolded. Beautifully played by Hugo Blanco, he wanders the film like a somnambulist locked in an anguished dream. Far from an unfeeling cadaver, he has a tortured emotional life that makes him as sympathetic as the Frankenstein Monster. Central to the film is the quasi-incestuous longing between Andros and his daughter Melissa, for whom the obstacles to forbidden desire could not be more profound; she has never even seen a picture of her dead father until the film is under way, yet within twenty-four hours she's cowering in her bed as his mute, staring features loom over her in the night. Despite his pallor, and the reptilian tracery of cracks in his face, his otherwise youthful appearance ensures Melissa's ambiguous fascination (Hugo Blanco was 27 at the time; Agnès Spaak was 19). The scene in which Andros enters his daughter's bedroom – a dead man, unable to speak, his eyes filled with longing – is a stand-out moment in Franco's early cinema.

In contrast to the incestuous undercurrents, the burgeoning romance between Melissa and mock-Lothario Manuel brings light and fun into the story. What begins as cliché – 'provincial rogue meets frosty city-girl' – swiftly turns into something more likeable, as Manuel admits that he's not the womaniser he's pretending to be and Melissa abandons her snootiness. It's a simple enough character arc, but it's well played, nicely scripted, and the actors are young, good-looking and agreeable. When the suspicious and inhospitable Professor Fisherman attempts to get rid of Manuel, you find yourself rooting for Melissa to realise the truth before it's too late. It's also worth noting that Manuel is quite similar to Andros in appearance, which tips an extra Freudian wink to the climax involving an Oedipal battle between Melissa's father and her new lover.

So yes, *Dr. Orloff's Monster* has abundant charm. However, it's also a confusing tangle of incoherent themes. Much as I love this film, it falls to me here to list the numerous infelicities and absurdities that prevent it from attaining its maximum potential. For instance, who in this household actually *knows* about the zombie that Fisherman keeps upstairs? When Andros 'malfunctions' and storms out of the house one night, the

Professor chases after him shouting his name. The commotion wakes Ingrid, who asks what he's doing, so how come she doesn't demand to know why he's running outside calling after his dead brother in the middle of the night? Does she *know* that the living corpse of her former lover is being kept in the house? "*Don't ask me to reveal my sorrows, I'd rather they were drowned in my distraction,*" she says, cradling a drink, so maybe she's knowingly suppressing her knowledge? If so, the idea is not sustained. Then there's Cicero, whom Fisherman takes with him to track down the errant zombie. The servant is unfazed at the sight of the creature, so he clearly knows the truth, yet his knowledge does not feed into the story. And what about Fisherman himself; what's his motive for sending Andros to murder young women? His beef is with his adulterous wife and his cuckolding brother; having killed one and driven the other to a lifetime of drunken despair, surely he's wreaked enough damage? Perhaps if a point were made that the women he seduces were all married, the murders might make sense as the petty destructiveness of a spurned husband. But there's nothing to indicate any of this, so Fisherman's choice of victims seems dismayingly random. Worst of all, in a badly blocked scene early on, Melissa walks unannounced into Fisherman's laboratory and totally ignores the partially visible figure of Andros standing silently in the far corner! As a footnote, the cod science is especially daft, even for this sort of film. Orloff suggests to Fisherman that his zombie could be made to move with ultrasonic sound, in combination with Pavlovian behavioural techniques. However, when Fisherman switches on his sonic device for the first time, Andros follows him at a mere hand gesture. No system of reward or punishment is seen to be applied, so the whole idea seems absurd. Perhaps most peculiar of all is the highly convenient, not to mention illogical, revival of the terminally ill Doctor Orloff. In his first scene at the start of the film Orloff is supposedly on his death bed, offering his wisdom to Fisherman because he knows he's about to die ("*I'm dying before our work is done,*" he gasps). However, in a much later scene, thrown away so casually you could be forgiven for missing it, Orloff listens to his wife reading aloud from the newspaper about the rash of murders, and subsequently pops up as an anonymous voice on the phone tipping off the police as they hunt for the killer! ("*I advise you to test those necklaces to see if they're ultrasonic transmitters. In case they are, question Professor Fisherman...*"). So after a miraculous offscreen recovery, Orloff has turned police snitch? What a disappointing corruption of the family bloodline!

To return to the positive, the seasonal holiday setting works beautifully. This is a Christmas horror film of sorts, even if the holiday is acknowledged only so that various characters can curse about it, or ruin the good cheer with bad vibes. Festivities may not be a cornerstone of the drama, as they are in, say, the American Christmas slashers of the 1970s and 80s, but *Dr. Orloff's Monster* has a Yuletide mood in the corner of its eye, which bestows a warm glow upon an otherwise melancholy story. It also enhances the



film's most poetic scene, as poor tormented Andros visits his own grave. Franco, aided by cinematographer Alfonso Nieva, creates here a mournfully elegant sequence as memorable as anything in the silent horror cinema, with Andros, alone, suspended between life and death, gazing helplessly at his gravestone against a background of desolate winter countryside. This and other scenes emphasising seasonal chill help to bring the virtues of the classic ghost story to this tale of familial spectres.

**Franco on screen:** Once again, as in *Gritos en la noche*, Jess appears as a nightclub pianist. He gets an extra scene in the French version, *Les Maîtresses du Docteur Jekyll*, playing the same character at home with a female friend.

**Cast and crew:** When Franco's plans to cast Howard Vernon as the villain had to be dropped because the Spanish producers were too tight-fisted to fly him in from Paris, the role fell instead to Marcelo Arroita-Jauregui, who would go on to appear in six more Franco films (*Residencia para espías*; *The Diabolical Dr. Z*; *Attack of the Robots*; *Lucky the Inscrutable*; *Sadisterotica*; *The Blood of Fu Manchu*). Born in the Spanish province of Cantabria in 1922, he entered the acting game in 1961 with a small role in Pedro Lazaga's *Trampa para Catalina*. Dr. Orloff's *Monster* was only his second role, and for most of the 1960s he alternated between Franco films and numerous Pedro Lazaga projects (such as the intermittently creepy *El rostro del asesino*, 1967). Of greater importance than acting to Jauregui was poetry: he published three collections in his lifetime: *El hombre es triste* ("Man is Sad") in 1951, *Tratado de la pena* ("Punishment Treaty") in 1958 and *Epístolas mortales* ("Fatal Epistles") in 1987. He also penned copious film criticism, wrote a monograph on the Hollywood director Rouben Mamoulian, and translated Eugène Ionesco's diaries into Spanish. He and Franco reportedly fell out over the censorship of Franco's 99 *Women* at a time when Jauregui was a serving member of the Spanish censor board. He died in Santander, Spain, on the 7 January 1992 ... Agnès Spaak was the daughter of Belgian screenwriter Charles Spaak (who co-wrote the screenplay for Renoir's *La Grande Illusion*), the niece of Paul-Henri Spaak (the Belgian foreign minister at the time of filming *Dr. Orloff's Monster*), and last but not least, sister of Catherine Spaak, whose career as an actress surpassed Agnès in number if not in style (Catherine is best known to Euro-horror buffs for her role in Dario Argento's *Cat O' Nine Tails* and she also appeared in a stylish and fascinating little movie with Bette Davis called *The Empty Canvas*, directed by Damiano Damiani in 1963) ... Co-star Pepe Rubio (real name José Rubio Urrea), was born in Lubrin, Almería in 1931 and died in Madrid on March 15, 2012, after a career in theatre and cinema. He became known as "the quintessential scoundrel of the Spanish scene" thanks to a slew of roguish performances, the most acclaimed of which was his lead role in Agustín Navarro's *Enseñar a un sinvergüenza* (1970) ... Cinematographer Alfonso Nieva was a regular working partner to director José María Elorrieta, having already shot fifteen of

Elorrieta's films before working with Franco. Nieva's subsequent contributions to the horror genre include the clunky but endearing *Necrophagus* (Miguel Madrid, 1971), *Escalofrío diabólico* (Jorge Martín, 1971), *Naked Girl Killed in the Park* (Alfonso Brescia, 1972) and *Sexy Cat* (Julio Pérez Tabernero, 1973) ... Note that the Spanish credits attribute the screenplay to "Nicole and Jesús Franco".

**Music:** Daniel White's excellent score pads fretfully around the soundstage with footsteps of piano and marimba, alternating with flourishes of romantic Hollywood strings. The music thus mirrors the two strands of the narrative: the gloomy atmosphere of life with Professor Fisherman and his wife, and the blossoming romance between Melissa and Manuel. Strange and unusual textures are then added by slowing down the tape recording of certain pieces, and by interpolating half-speed recordings of Gamelan percussion during the scene at the opium den.

**Locations:** The central outdoor location is the 15th century Coracera Castle in San Martín de Valdeiglesias, a town near Madrid. The reception hall of the Fisherman residence is recognisable as Dr. Orloff's castle in the first film, and turns up again (with the furnishings in exactly the same position!) eight years later for José Luis Madrid's *Jack el destripador de Londres* (1971) and José María Elorrieta's *La llamada del vampiro* (1972), so it seems most likely that this was a location (probably a museum or carefully restored period building) rather than a standing set, or else surely directors would have moved the ornamentation around a little in that time? (Besides, interiors for *The Awful Dr. Orloff* were filmed at Ballesteros Studios in Madrid, whereas those for *Jack el destripador de Londres* were filmed at Balcázar Studios near Barcelona). Coracera Castle can also be seen prominently in José María Elorrieta's *The Feast of Satan* (1971).

**Studio:** Estudios Ballesteros (Madrid).

**Connections:** The troubled, tormented Andros, radio controlled and forced to kill, is reminiscent of the somnambulist Cesare committing murder at the bidding of an evil mesmerist in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920), an influence already apparent in *The Awful Dr. Orloff's Morpho* but with the added element here of quasi-scientific mind control ... The brooding montage that opens the film emulates the style of the first two minutes of *La mano de un hombre muerto* (the original Spanish cut of *The Sadistic Baron von Klaus*) ... Also reprised from *The Sadistic Baron von Klaus* is the fictional town of Holfen ... Melissa is seen reading an issue of *Elle* magazine dated January 1964, featuring a story called *Que devenez-vous?* ("What do you get?") by M. [Marcel] Clouzot, the lesser-known brother of Henri-George Clouzot, director of the 1955 film classic *Les Diaboliques* ...

**Other versions:** There are three significantly different versions of this film in circulation: the extremely rare Spanish original, *El secreto del Doctor Orloff* (available among collectors only in a terrible quality recording apparently obtained by pointing a video camera at a TV transmission); the American International

US TV version called *Dr. Orloff's Monster*, released video-only by Something Weird in 1994; and *Les Maîtresses du Docteur Jekyll*, the French version released theatrically by Eurociné and put out on DVD with English and French audio tracks by Arrow Films in 2002. (A second US version, released on DVD by Image Entertainment as *Dr. Orloff's Monster*, is in fact the same cut as *Les Maîtresses du Docteur Jekyll*.)

The American International TV cut of *Dr. Orloff's Monster* is the closest match to Franco's original, with only two small differences: it freeze-frames a scene under the credits in which we should see Doctor Fisherman walking across a bridge and arriving at the home of Doctor Orloff, and more regrettably it redubs the last word of the film, changing Andros's anguished "¿Por qué?" ('Why?') into the rather less bleak "Thank-you"! *Les Maîtresses du Docteur Jekyll*, on the other hand, differs in four significant respects. After newly minted credits over a static backdrop, the second and third differences involve substantive changes. When Eurociné released *Les Maîtresses du Docteur Jekyll* they 'updated' certain scenes, just as they had when turning the original *Gritos en la noche* into the more explicit *L'Horrible Docteur Orloff*. In terms of both explicit nudity and technique the new scenes shot for *Les Maîtresses du Docteur Jekyll* stand out like sore thumbs. The first occurs early on, when Andros attacks a burlesque dancer in her dressing room. In Franco's original cut Andros enters a jazz club and, while the band plays on, walks over to a fully clothed woman (Maribel Hidalgo) sitting at the bar. She's the woman we saw earlier accepting Fisherman's gift of a necklace, and she's clearly wearing it now. The necklace emits an electronic sound which only Andros can hear; he approaches and strangles her before walking away unnoticed. The new footage, shot in 1965, replaces Hidalgo with a blonde stripper whose sexy routine is far racier than anything in the Spanish cut. After cavorting around showing her ample behind in black stockings, she retires to her dressing room where she's attacked by Andros – or so we're meant to think. However, the new footage features a completely different actor standing in for Hugo Blanco: despite the camera-angle attempting to conceal the actor's face, the imposter is clearly visible in a mirror during the strangulation! In the second new scene, Andros attacks a woman as she takes a bath (her husband, seen downstairs playing the piano, is Franco himself, reviving his fleetingly glimpsed nightclub pianist in the original shoot – clearly the new material was shot with his full involvement). This murder is inserted between Fisherman summoning Cicero to catch Andros and the horse-drawn carriage ride through the woods (incidentally, the carriage is a deliberate anachronism that looks forward to 1971's *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein*). Once again a stand-in for Hugo Blanco is used (with Blanco's reaction shots culled from the original version), and again the stand-in's face can be seen quite clearly in one shot, this time as he makes his escape. Although the new addition has the salutary effect of raising the film's body count, it really makes no sense.

The female victim is not only unknown to us, she's unknown to the killer, and she's not even wearing the necklace, which is how Andros is supposed to 'home in' on his victims. It seems that this new murder is spontaneously committed by Andros without Fisherman's orders. But if so, why kill this woman? If we'd seen Andros's cabinet hit by a lightning surge we could at least attribute the murder to a technical fault; as it is, the killing distorts the film's theme by making the otherwise blameless 'zombie' responsible for gratuitous murder ... Note: though listed in *Obsession* as running 99 minutes, the TV transmission version of *El secreto del Doctor Orloff* clocks in at just over 88 minutes.

**Press coverage:** *La Vanguardia*'s correspondent was unimpressed, citing higher hopes after *Gritos en la noche*: "After Jesús Franco's latest productions we expected of him better work than this monster movie full of anguish and diabolic experiments, with special effects that make adults smile despite being accompanied by scary music and the customary visit to the graveyard."<sup>4</sup> In the pages of *ABC Andalucía*, however, another critic was more enthusiastic: "Under the effective direction of Jesús Franco, the film unfolds in the best possible way, handling the difficult possibilities of making good cinema within the horror genre without falling into the exaggerated or the grotesque. ... Alongside horrific incidents, love plays an important role in the film, thus offering such sharp contrasts that at times the viewer forgets the tragic argument that is the real theme of the film."<sup>5</sup> Over at *El Mundo Deportivo*, the response, though brief, was also upbeat: "In this movie, Franco tells a horrifying story of exciting anguish that doesn't allow the viewer who enjoys strong emotions a moment of respite."<sup>6</sup> When the film played in Italy, as *Le amanti del Dr. Jekyll*, it met with some qualified praise from *La Stampa*: "Billed as a perfect cocktail of 'horror' and 'sexy', *Le amanti del Dr. Jekyll* has little of either one or the other. The director Jess Frank, while being faced with the usual horror screenplay (English castle, a living corpse at liberty, thunderstorms and creaking doors), does include some footage of a pleasing formal elegance. The protagonist is Agnès Spaak, her face a bit dazed even in the most terrifying scenes, torn between respect for her crazy uncle and love for her vampire father."<sup>7</sup>

# WELLES, SHAKESPEARE, STEVENSON & FRANCO

by Julian Grainger

## **Treasure Island [unfinished] (1964)**

director: Orson Welles. assistant director: Jesús Franco.

## **Chimes at Midnight (1965)**

director: Orson Welles. 2nd unit director: Jesús Franco.

## **Treasure Island [Unfinished]**

**Spain & Switzerland 1964**

### *Alternative titles*

La isla del tesoro (SP shooting title) *Treasure Island*

### *Production companies*

**Internacional Films Española, S.A.** (Madrid)

**Alpine Productions** (Basel)

### *Timeline*

shooting date	started 05 October	1964
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**Cast:** **Orson Welles** (Long John Silver). **Keith Baxter** (Doctor Livesey). **McIntosh Ferguson** (Jim Hawkins). **Tony Beckley** (Israel Hands). **John Gielgud** (Squire Trelawney). **Robert Morley**. **Fernando Rey**. **Hugh Griffith**.

**Credits:** director: **Orson Welles**. screenplay: **Orson Welles**; based on the novel by **Robert Louis Stevenson**. director of photography: **Edmond Richard**. producers: **Emiliano Piedra**, **Angel Escolano**. assistant director: **Jesús Franco**. camera operator: **Adolphe Charlet**. camera assistant: **Javier Pita**. costumes: **Cornejo**.

## **Chimes at Midnight**

(UK theatrical title)

**Spain & Switzerland 1964**

Spanish depósito legal number: M. 7.081-1965

### *Original theatrical title in country of origin*

**Campanadas a medianoche** (SP) *Chimes at Midnight*

### *Alternative titles*

**Falstaff** (**Chimes at Midnight**) (on-screen title)

**Falstaff** (US theatrical)

**Campanadas de media tarde** (SP shooting title)

*Chimes of the Afternoon*

**Campanas a medianoche** (SP shooting title) *Bells at Midnight*

### *Production companies*

**Internacional Films Española, S.A.** (Madrid)

**Alpine Productions** (Basel)

### *Theatrical distributors*

**Brepi Films, S.A.** (Madrid)

**Peppercorn-Wormser Inc. Film Enterprises** (New York)

**Planet Film Distributors Ltd** (London)

### *Timeline*

Shooting date	12 Oct. 1964 - April	1965
Barcelona premiere	22 December	1965
Madrid	06 May	1966
USA (New York)	19 March	1967
UK 'U' certificate issued	16 March	1967

### *Theatrical running time*

Spain	113m
UK running time	115m 40s

**Cast:** **Orson Welles** (Sir John 'Jack' Falstaff). **Jeanne Moreau** (Mistress Doll Tearsheet). **Margaret Rutherford** (Mistress Nell Quickly, proprietor of Boar's Head Tavern). **John Gielgud** (King Henry IV, formerly Henry Hereford, Duke of Bolingbroke). **Marina Vlady** (Kate Percy, Hotspur's wife). **Walter Chiari** (Justice Silence, Shallow's cousin). **Michael Aldridge** (Pistol, a friend of Falstaff). **Julio Peña** (Westmoreland man). **Tony Beckley** (Ned Poins, friend of Falstaff and Hal). **Andrés Mejuto** (Lord Scroop). **Keith Pyott** (Lord Chief Justice). **Jeremy Rowe** (Prince John, Henry IV's second son). **Alan Webb** (Justice Shallow, an old friend of Falstaff's). **Fernando Rey** (Thomas Percy, Earl of Worcester). **Keith Baxter** (Harry Monmouth, 'Prince Hal', heir to the throne). **Norman Rodway** (Henry Percy, 'Hotspur'). **José Nieto** (Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland). **Andrew Faulds** (Earl of Westmoreland, the king's chief adviser). **Charles Farrell**



(Bardolph, a friend of Falstaff and Hal). **Fernando Hilbeck** (Sir Richard Vernon, cousin to the Percys). **Paddy [Patrick] Bedford** (Peto, young friend of Falstaff and Hal). **Beatrice Welles** (Falstaff's pageboy). **Ralph Richardson** (narrator). *credited on Spanish poster*: **Antonio Casas** (Westmoreland man/courtier). **Luis Morris** (Ralph Mouldy). **Goyo Lebrero** (sheriff man #2). **Antonio Giménez Escribano**. **Fernando Cano**. *uncredited*: **Mickey Knox** (Sir Walter Blunt). **Alessandro Tasca di Cutò** (Archbishop of Canterbury). **Luis Ciges** (younger of two men attending to Hotspur). **Mike Brendel** (Peter Bullcalf). **Bruno Yasoni** (pageboy). **Ingrid Pitt** (blonde at Boar's Head Tavern).

*Credits*: director: **Orson Welles**. adapted from plays by **William Shakespeare**. photography: **Edmond Richard**. editing: **Fritz [Federico] Muller**. executive art director: **José Antonio de la Guerra**. music: **Angelo [Francesco] Lavagnino**. producers: **Emiliano Piedra**, **Ángel Escolano**. executive producer: **Alessandro Tasca**. presenter: **Harry Saltzman**. production manager: **Gustavo Quintana**. assistant director: **Tony [Antonio] Fuentes**. assistant to the director: **Juan Cobos**. cameraman: **Alejandro Ulloa**. camera operator: **Adolphe Charlet**. 2nd unit operator: **Jorge Herrero**. music conductor: **Carlo Franci**. second editor: **Elena Jaumandreu**. set builder: **Mariano Erdoiza**. props: **Mateos**. make-up: **Francisco Puyol**. costumes: **Cornejo** (Madrid). laboratories: **Fotofilm-Madrid, S.A.**. recording: **EXA Madrid, S.A.**; **S.I.S.** (Paris). sound editor: **Peter Parashales**. *uncredited*: based on scenes from *Henry IV, Part 1*, *Henry IV, Part 2*, *Richard II*, *Henry V* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. 2nd assistant director: **Alfredo Hurtado**. continuity: **Francisco Alcocer**, **Julián Marcos**. 2nd unit director: **Jesús Franco**. art director/costume designer: **Orson Welles**. assistant art directors: **Manuel Frias**, **Rafael Salazar**. properties: **Antonio Mateos**. electricians: **Luis Rodríguez**, **Enrique Molinero**. camera assistants: **José Cobos**, **Saturnino Pita**. stills photography: **Manuel Martínez**. assistant editors: **Enrique Agulló**, **Manolito Gordillo**. tailor: **Vicente Martín**. 2nd unit crew: **Waldo Leirós**, **Antonio Gasset**, **Juan Estelrich**. Spanish script translation: **Juan Cobos**. 2nd assistant to the director/dialogue coach: **Mickey Knox**. Spanish dubbing: **Sincronía-Sevilla Films** (Madrid), directed by **Simón Ramírez**; supervised by **Juan Cobos**.

Orson Welles was a genuine Hispanophile; he spent most of the 1960s living in a villa just outside of Madrid with his actress wife Paolo Mori and their daughter Beatrice until a fire destroyed their home in 1970. He visibly enjoyed the country's enticing food and drink and was frequently photographed attending bullfights while puffing away on his trademark cigars.

Welles had long harboured an ambition to make a film based on one of his favourite Shakespearean characters, one that appeared in several of the Bard's plays and who, in many ways, resembled the corpulent Welles himself. It was a combination of scenes from

William Shakespeare's plays featuring the roguish, larger-than-life character of Falstaff, a knight of the realm, and the story of his relationship with Prince Hal, son of King Henry IV. The screenplay is largely adapted from *Henry IV* (Parts 1 and 2) but there is also material from *Henry V*, *Richard II*, some dialogue from *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, plus a touch of Welles-doing-Shakespeare. Welles had tried various Shakespearean mash-ups in play form as far back as his schooldays and an early version of *Chimes* entitled *Five Kings* was staged by his Mercury Theater company in 1939. A re-vamped version – now called *Chimes at Midnight* – was presented in 1960 in Belfast and Dublin. Both productions were commercial failures.

Early in 1964 Welles had travelled to Belgrade to shoot his scenes for Raoul J. Lévy's gargantuan and much-troubled *Marco the Magnificent*, based on the life of Marco Polo. Presumably the experience was satisfactory (for Welles at least) because soon after his return to Spain he announced that *Falstaff* (an alternative title for *Chimes at Midnight*) would soon be made as an Italian-Yugoslavian co-production shooting in southeastern Europe.

Welles must have begun to wonder if his project wasn't cursed when that plan too came to nought. Help was on hand however, in the guise of a wealthy, energetic young Spanish producer named Emiliano Piedra. Piedra and his partner Ángel Escolano had already made several co-productions through their Madrid-based company Internacional Films España (IFE), including *La boda* (1963) with Argentina and *I magnifici brutos del West* (1964) with Italy. Although set in medieval Britain, Welles had realised that he could shoot *Chimes at Midnight* in Spain utilising its many ancient castles and walled cities. Piedra was interested in investing in the project but according to Juan Cobos<sup>1</sup>, Welles admitted to his inexperienced Spanish producer that his Shakespearean projects had all failed to find success at the box-office. To offset any losses *Chimes at Midnight* might make, Welles proposed a version of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* which both men were convinced was sure to be a hit. Piedra and Escolano supplied \$1,000,000 to make the two films back-to-back via IFE and Welles's Swiss-registered Alpine Productions, with assistance from his old friend Alessandro Tasca di Cutò.<sup>2</sup> As far as the actual production of the films was concerned, Piedra apparently gave Welles carte blanche...

Welles had spent a protracted period of pre-production selecting locations and constructing an enormous set of The Boar's Head tavern at Eastcheap in a converted suburban warehouse near Madrid that could also double as Stevenson's Admiral Benbow Inn where Billy Bones is cursed with the black spot by the terrifying Blind Pew. *Chimes at Midnight* was one of the largest productions ever to have been filmed entirely in Spain. *Variety* reported that even a modest production would be paying £350 per day for studio rental while Welles' warehouse cost a mere \$1,200 per month. Welles was also responsible for the costume design and was sufficiently concerned that the sets should appear properly aged that even the start of filming in Madrid was delayed while everyone set to work with hammers, brushes and blow-torches.<sup>3</sup>

Apart from those actors especially chosen by Welles – John Gielgud, his beloved Jeanne Moreau, Margaret Rutherford, Keith Baxter plus a memorable contingent of British character actors – the large cast was filled out with a number of distinguished Spanish performers. Blacklisted actor and writer Mickey Knox was hired by Welles as dialogue director/actor on *Chimes* and in his fascinating memoir *The Good, the Bad and Dolce Vita* relates how celebrated Spanish actor Fernando Rey was on Generalissimo Franco's 'shit list' for taking the Loyalist side during the Spanish civil war and was refused permission to appear. Welles had to threaten to relocate the film to France in order to secure Rey's services. Knox also mentions that one of his duties was to cast Spanish actors for the smaller roles, and that he hired the wonderful bug-eyed Victor Israel for a part. According to Knox there was reluctance to hire Israel on the part of the production because he was Jewish and once again, Welles had to remonstrate with the film's production manager to get Israel hired. Curiously, this highly distinctive actor isn't visible in the finished film.<sup>4</sup>

It was *Treasure Island* – or *La isla del tesoro* to give the film its Spanish title – that began filming first, on 5 October 1964.<sup>5</sup> At least one scene was shot that day featuring Keith Baxter as Doctor Livesey and Tony Beckley as Israel Hands aboard the 'Hispañola' – the same ship that had been used for the earlier filming of *Billy Budd* – moored in Alicante. The ship was filmed leaving the port and while it sailed round the coast to Calpe, the crew travelled overland to film its arrival. Franco stated that exterior location footage had largely been completed when bad weather stopped filming – far from surprising given the time of year. It is possible that further scenes were filmed while the *Chimes at Midnight* crew were back in the Madrid warehouse, given the set's dual purpose.

A mere week later (12 Oct.), Welles started shooting *Chimes at Midnight*. While *Treasure Island* had been filmed in colour, Welles felt it essential that *Chimes* be filmed in black and white. Piedra wasn't at all keen but the reality of producing two films simultaneously was stretching even his deep pockets and at least monochromatic filming would keep the budget down: he acquiesced. Scenes for either or both films were shot as each of the famous 'guest' actors became available: Margaret Rutherford was there for four weeks, John Gielgud for three and Jeanne Moreau for just one. Clearly filming was even more disjointed than usual and Keith Baxter recalls that virtually every shot was filmed out of sequence – a script supervisor's nightmare! Welles was supported by a large, largely Spanish crew, with the exception of Frenchman Edmond Richard and his camera operator on the first unit. Jess Franco was in charge of second unit shooting, with Antonio Gasset his assistant and with Jorge Herrero on camera. How Franco came to work on *Chimes* is a matter of some conjecture: Franco has stated that Welles had seen *La muerte silba un blues* and that it was this that got him the job. More likely, however, is that it was the work of Juan Cobos, who was serving as Welles' assistant on the production. Cobos had worked on the scripts of both *La mano de un hombre muerto*

(1962) and *Rififi en la ciudad* (1963) and during this period was also busy adapting Franco's story for what became *Espionage in Lisbon* (1965). Writer Waldo Leirós also worked as part of Franco's unit, as did old friend Juan Estelrich (the second assistant director on *Tenemos 18 años*), who makes an uncredited appearance in the film as the sheriff sent to collect Falstaff from the tavern.

Filming began in Madrid and was followed by shooting in nearby Colmenar Viejo (a favourite location for spaghetti westerns). Welles filmed many scenes in Cardona in the Catalan province of Barcelona before shooting extensively in the north-western Spanish autonomous community of Castile and León, with locations including the ancient walled city of Ávila, Pedraza (street scenes) and the snowy surroundings of Soria and its magnificent cathedral. The crew returned to Madrid in December 1964 to shoot ten days-worth of epic battle sequences in Casa de Campo park (where Franco would later shoot battle scenes for his own film *The Bloody Judge*). The Spanish press was invited to see some of the filming in Ávila and reported the film's title variously as "Campanadas de media tarde" and "Campanas a medianoche". However Welles had made no efforts to publicise his new film outside of Spain and a slightly miffed Hank Werba (one of *Variety*'s most senior European correspondents) implied not only that Welles was virtually making-up this expensive film as he went along but also that he was also re-bowdlerizing Shakespeare by having Jeanne Moreau pull out all the stops playing the prostitute Doll Tearsheet.<sup>6</sup>

Filming continued for ten days or so after the Christmas break before, according to *Variety*, Welles was stricken with a serious gall-bladder complaint. This was a disaster. Welles was ordered to undertake an indefinite period of treatment and Piedra was left with no choice but to pay off the crew and cast, disband the unit and shut down production.<sup>7</sup>

It seems likely that it was always the intention to shoot only a few selected scenes for *Treasure Island* during October before completing the film the following year once the weather had improved. *Variety* was reporting that the film was scheduled for filming 'next spring' (1965) as early as December 1964, over a fortnight before Welles was reported unwell.<sup>8</sup> The Spanish press only mentioned Welles's health problems towards the end of filming – at the tail end of February 1965 – when it was reported that not only was he suffering from a sprained ankle and forced to use a crutch but that earlier on he had been laid low with some sort of liver disease. In early March it was reported that Welles was recovering from a fractured shin-bone!<sup>9</sup> Whatever the nature of Welles's illnesses, there needed to be some serious damage limitation if the films were to be completed. Welles' size and ill-health meant that *Variety* was told that *Treasure Island* was now to be directed as an Orson Welles-starring vehicle... "under the direction of Spain's Jesús Franco (one of many promising Wellesian proteges) once "*Chimes*" is behind him."<sup>10</sup> It is highly probable that Franco was announced as the film's director as cover for the uninsurable director, and furthermore, Franco himself has stated that it was always the intention that Welles would direct the film.

It's curious how contemporary press reports conflict with more recent interviews with regard to *Chimes at Midnight*: Keith Baxter – intimately connected with the film's entire production – makes no mention of Welles falling ill and states that filming stopped in late December because the production ran short of funds. Franco appears to have fallen out with Welles at some point and subsequently criticised him in interviews for wasting much of the film's budget.

Welles resumed filming in mid-February 1965 with the arrival of Walter Chiari – as Justice Silence – from Italy. He had left the filming of most of his soliloquies until last and any two-shots or group-shots were achieved using stand-ins. Filming finally ground to a halt in April as the arduous and protracted editing process began. Funds were running low and as Welles toiled away shaping months'-worth of footage, the spring resumption of *Treasure Island* came and went with no cameras turning. Financial aide came in the shape of British-based, cash-rich Canadian producer Harry Saltzman, whose third James Bond adventure *Goldfinger* had recently made him marginally wealthier than God. (It's a sign of how bizarre the film world is that *Chimes at Midnight* would probably not have been completed without the success of *Goldfinger*.) Saltzman spent a cool \$1,600,000 on acquiring world rights to the film minus Spain and France, which Piedra retained. *Chimes* would eventually be seen by over half a million paying customers in each of these two countries.

Post-production was complex: the film needed wall-to-wall post-synching with Keith Baxter attending re-voicing sessions in Paris, Madrid and London. Finally a score was written by prolific Rome-based composer Angelo Francesco Lavagnino, who had worked with Welles on *Othello* (1955). Estimates of the final cost of *Chimes at Midnight* typically vary from source to source but fell somewhere between \$700,000 (contemporary reports) and \$1 million (persistent contemporary reports in *Variety*).

Post-production was finally completed circa August 1965 and the film was released in Barcelona in December of that year. The film's international premiere screening was at the 1966 Cannes Film Festival in May, where it won a specially-created 'Twentieth Anniversary Special Prize'. The film's critical reception was positive but no less than two damning reviews by Bosley Crowther of *The New York Times* queered the pitch for an American release and instead of a major studio release, the film was acquired by the small, newly-formed Peppercorn-Wormser Inc. Film Enterprises and released in New York, finally, in March 1967.

Intriguingly, the Stevenson project was still under consideration as late as March 1966 when *Variety* reported that Seven Arts had signed a deal for US distribution rights to Orson Welles's *Treasure Island* which was to begin filming in April in Spain. That appears to be the end of it until producer Harry Alan Towers revived the project in 1971 as a vehicle for his new young star, a post-*Oliver!* Mark Lester. Towers had made an adaptation of the children's classic *Black Beauty* in Spain and Ireland followed immediately

by the extraordinary *Night Hair Child* under Silvio Narizzano's direction, again in Spain. Film number three was to be a new version of *Treasure Island* to shoot in Spain in April 1971 starring Lester as Jim Hawkins and Yul Brynner as Long John Silver with Narizzano again at the helm. Narizzano appears to have left the project – taking Lester with him – only just before shooting was to start and consequently the project collapsed. Perhaps Welles read the resulting press coverage but one way or another, he and Towers were reunited once more under the rather stolid direction of John Hough, apparently having combined two pre-existing scripts – one by Welles and one by Wolf Mankowitz. For the record, Towers confirmed that the film (which saw release in 1972) was entirely Hough's work and that the 'Andrew White' credited as director on European prints – a pseudonym for Italian director Andrea Bianchi – was entirely for quota purposes. Furthermore he denied that any of the exterior footage made for the 1965 Welles/Piedra version was used and that new material was filmed.<sup>11</sup> Mark Lester was replaced by the somewhat insipid Kim Burfield and it's interesting to consider how much better the film might have been with the more experienced Lester's participation.

Franco's main contribution to *Chimes at Midnight* appears to have been the footage shot for the climactic battle scenes at Casa de Campo in Madrid. Whether or not Franco really felt that Welles had wasted money on the film, as he once implied, the two would seem to have remained friends. In December 1965 it was reported that Welles provided seed money for *Griffith*, a new Madrid-based film journal whose directors were Jess Franco, producer Francisco Molero and set decorator Francisco Prosper. Launched as an Iberian answer to France's *Cahiers du Cinéma*, *Griffith* intended to mix film theory with "working knowledge of the industry."<sup>12</sup> Writers included Juan Cobos, Antonio Gasset and Waldo Leirós: these last three – plus Jess Franco – had all worked on *Chimes at Midnight*.

The plan to make two films back-to-back may not have proved altogether successful in Welles's case but Franco seems to have taken to the idea and run with it, most notably with *Sadisterotica* and *Kiss Me Monster*, shot together at the tail end of 1967. Any Francophile will recognise the Spanish coastal towns of Alicante and Calpé and it was subsequent to working on *Treasure Island* that they became two of his habitual locations. Franco would hire Fernando Rey for the first time on *Attack of the Robots*, made at the tail end of 1965 after the summer shoot of *The Diabolical Dr. Z*, and would be reunited with the actor over 20 years later for *Esmeralda Bay*. Perhaps the enduring legacy of Franco's time with Welles was an understanding of how he (Franco) really wanted to make films: shooting with a small crew, with whatever means came to hand, and surrounded by trusted friends and colleagues. There are many tales of Orson Welles the bon viveur (Mickey Knox again) and it is striking that so many of Franco's collaborators remember less the shooting of the films themselves than the convivial evenings spent with Franco and his film-making family.



## THE DIABOLICAL DR. Z

**Spain & France 1965**

Spanish depósito legal number: M-15.323-1965

French visa number: 30421

*Original theatrical title in country of origin*

**Miss Muerte** (SP) *Miss Death*

**Dans les griffes du maniaque** (FR) *In the Grip of the Maniac*

*Alternative titles*

**Le Diabolique Docteur Z** (alt. FR theatrical)

**Le Diabolique Docteur "Z"** (FR theatrical poster)

**El Diabólico Dr Z** (MEX theatrical)

**In de greep van der maniak** (BEL th) *In the Grip of the Maniac*

**Das Geheimnis des Doktor Z** (GER theatrical)

*The Secret of Doctor Z*

**El doctor Z y Miss Muerte** (SP shooting title)

**Doctor Z and Miss Death** (BBFC admission sheet)

*Production companies*

**Hesperia Films, S.A.** (Madrid)

**Speva Films, S.A.** (Paris)

**Ciné Alliance** (Paris)

*Theatrical distributors*

**Mercurio Films, S.A.** (Madrid)

**Mondial Film** (France)

**U.S. Films, Inc.** (Hollywood) ['Presented by Joe Solomon']

**D.U.K. Films** (UK)

*Timeline*

Shooting date	May-June	1965
Madrid premiere	15 August	1966
Barcelona	14 November	1966
USA (Los Angeles)	15 February	1967
UK 'X' certificate issued	23 March	1967
Seville	24 July	1967
France	13 September	1967
Belgium (Kortrijk)	30 January	1969

*Theatrical running times*

Spain	86m
France	88m
USA	86m
UK	78m26s

**Cast:** **Mabel Karr** (Irma Zimmer). **Estella Blain** (Nadia, 'Miss Muerte'). **Fernando Montés** (Dr. Philippe Brighthouse). **Howard Vernon** (Professor Vicas). **Guy Mairesse** (Hans Bergen, escaped

killer). **Marcelo Arroita-Jáuregui** (Dr. Moroni). **Antonio Giménez Escribano** (Dr. Zimmer). **Cris Huerta** (Dr. Kallman). **Ángela Tamayo** (June van Bocken, hitchhiker). **Mer Casas** (Sandra Moroni). **Lucía Prado** (Barbara). **Alberto Bourbón** (dark-haired policeman at lakeside). *uncredited:* **Daniel White** (Inspector Green). **Jess Franco** (Inspector Tanner). **Vicente Roca** (police doctor). **Rafael Hernández** (Green's assistant). **José Villasante** (Tanner's driver). **Nieves Salcedo** (nightclub MC).

*Credits:* director: **Jess Franco**. original story: **David Khunne**. adaptation & dialogue: **Jean-Claude Carrière**. director of photography: **Alejandro Ulloa**. editors: **Jean Feyte**, **Marie-Louise Barberot** [FR prints]. art director: **Tony [Antonio] Cortés**. music: **Daniel White**. producers: **Michel Saffra**, **Serge Silberman** [FR prints]. production supervisor: **Luis Laso Moreno**. production managers: **Eric Geiger** / **Henri Baum** [FR prints]. location manager: **Germán Quejido**. production administrators: **Jacqueline Duddleux**, **Jean van Praag** [FR prints]. assistant production: **Luis Busch**. production secretary: **Odette Darrigol** [FR prints]. 1st assistant director: **Gael de Milicua**. 2nd assistant director: **Luis Revenga**. assistant director: **Robert Demollière** [FR prints]. continuity: **Carmen Robledo** / **Nicole Guettard** [FR prints]. camera operator: **Clemente Manzano**. assistant editors: **Arlette Lalande**, **Monique Teisseire** [FR prints]. assistant art director: **Fernando Guillot**. make-up: **Francisco Ramón Ferrer**. make-up assistant: **Dolores Hidalgo**. laboratory: **Franay L.T.C.** (Saint-Cloud) [FR prints]. prints: **Movielab** [US prints]. sound re-recording & mixing: **Société Lingua Synchrone** [FR prints]. sound recordist: **Louis Hochet** [FR prints]. music publisher: **Eco-Music**. *uncredited:* Spanish producer: **Carlos Couret**.

**Synopsis:** *Hans Bergen, the 'Woodside Strangler', escapes from prison and collapses at the gates of a clinic run by Dr. Zimmer. Zimmer, accompanied by his daughter Irma and lab assistant Barbara, realises that the man is a criminal and subjects him to his latest innovation, a brain-drilling device that removes the impulse to commit evil and places the recipient in a trance-like state of obedience. At a medical conference later that month, Zimmer tries to impress his peers with his discoveries, avoiding mention of his recent human experiment but seeking their approval for the future use of human subjects. Instead he is so aggressively berated by the other psychologists that he suffers a fatal heart attack. Irma, consumed by hatred, embarks upon a campaign of revenge against the three doctors she holds most responsible for her father's death - Moroni, Vicas and Kallman. In furtherance of her plans she kidnaps a young nightclub performer, the sultry 'Miss Death' (real name Nadia), and subjects her to the Zimmer mind-control process. Thus reduced to a slave obeying Irma's wishes, 'Miss Death' tracks down and kills the three doctors using her unusually long fingernails dipped in poison. Meanwhile Nadia's boyfriend flirts with Irma whilst trying to get to the bottom of his girlfriend's disappearance, with the help of the Spanish police and two visiting detectives from Scotland Yard...*

**Production notes:** In the spring of 1965, Franco signed a four-picture deal with producer Carlos Couret of Madrid-based Hesperia Films that would keep him busy, on and off, for the next 18 months. First he re-wrote the script for *La muerte silba un blues*, shot in April-May of 1965 as *077 Misión Lisboa* (aka *Espionage in Lisbon*) on Portuguese and Madrid locations by Spanish-based Argentinian émigré Tulio Demicheli. Almost simultaneously (in early May) he started work on *Miss Muerte* (aka *The Diabolical Dr. Z*), filming until mid-June, and by mid-October *Cartas boca arriba* (aka *Attack of the Robots*) was in production on location in southern Spain. Producer Couret must have been pleased with the collaboration because the following July and August found Franco shooting *Golden Horn* for Hesperia in the high summer heat of Turkey, Spain and Bulgaria. (Couret would step in once again – alongside Commonwealth United, Alexander Hachon's Cineproduzioni Associate and Corona of Germany in 1968 – to provide completion funds for *99 Women* and *Venus in Furs*.) Perhaps Franco found time to visit the Portuguese locations for *Espionage in Lisbon*, or maybe Couret reported back to him the delights of the location filming. Either way, Franco would soon make his first trip to Portugal as a filmmaker to shoot *Succubus* in early 1967.

During this time, Franco struck up a cordial relationship with noted screenwriter Jean-Claude Carrière, a friendship which grew into a script collaboration on *The Diabolical Dr. Z* and *Attack of the Robots*. Carrière had recently scripted Luis Buñuel's *Diary of a Chambermaid* (1964); Franco and Carrière were introduced to each other by Buñuel's producers on that film, Serge Silberman and Michel Safra. A press announcement on 29 May 1965 declared that the film – then called 'Dr. Z and Miss Death' – was about to begin shooting, and would be "a new version of Stevenson's famous novel *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*", adding that "the innovation of this new Spanish version will be that the protagonist is a woman instead of a man ... the transformation of the character will not be physical, as in Stevenson's novel, but only mental and moral."<sup>1</sup> At this point production was probably already under way, because in one scene we see Daniel White (playing a police inspector) brandishing a crisp neat copy of *The Daily Mail*, the headline of which refers to a mining accident that occurred on 17 May 1965.<sup>2</sup> *The Diabolical Dr. Z* opened in Madrid on 15 August 1966...

**Review:** Franco's finest work in black and white, and one of his best films overall, *The Diabolical Dr. Z* is a fantastically atmospheric, skilfully woven tale comparable in style and expertise to the work of Italy's Mario Bava. As with Bava, there's not a lot going on under the surface – but what a surface! Aided by Alejandro Ulloa's marvellous photography, and a budget that allows for seductive tracking shots and careful lighting, Franco sutures this horror hokum into a truly lustrous package. There's genuine suspense here too: in Franco's later horror movies dread and anticipation are etiolated into abstraction, so it's striking to see the lineaments of tension and release laid out here as nail-bitingly as one could wish.

Like many of Franco's 1960s films, *Dr. Z* proves that the 'missing' elements in his later work – like suspense, or classical narrative – are wilful or contingent subtractions, and not, as is often surmised, simply beyond his ability.

*The Diabolical Dr. Z* is distinguished by a persistent strain of moral ambivalence colouring every major characterisation in the film. The intent of the titular Doctor Zimmer – to drain 'evil' from the minds of criminals leaving them compliant and without self-will – is thoroughly immoral, although he claims a benevolent motive: "All the killers, all the abnormal, all the sadists, all the maniacs could be transmuted into wise and good persons, and they would have a chance to begin a normal life." His malevolent daughter Irma expresses no such concern for society's outcasts, and after Zimmer dies of a heart attack she sees nothing wrong with subjugating the impressionable 'vegetables' his methods create; however, she is clearly unbalanced by grief for her beloved father.

Besides, the victims are scarcely innocents. The first of them, Bergen, is an escaped maniac who has already killed four people. Fleeing the hangman's noose, he falls instead into the clutches of the demon doctor. The three scientists who hound Zimmer to death, Kallman, Moroni and Vicas, may be right to reject the fascism inherent in his work, but they're also tiresome, arrogant blowhards: you can't help but feel sorry for Zimmer as he suffers a fatal heart attack during a particularly crushing bout of 'peer review'. One of the delicious ironies of the film is that even "the strange and voluptuous Miss Death" is far from the uncomplicated agent of darkness we might suppose. Though deadly, with long sharp fingernails dipped in curare, she's merely the instrument of another's will, therefore we care for poor Nadia even as she stalks and kills. She's just a sweet, naive girl tempted by the promise of Hollywood fame and fortune: the real 'Miss Death' is the intellectual Irma, coldly manipulating Nadia to do her bidding. Then there's Philippe, Nadia's supposedly concerned boyfriend, who, hedging his bets somewhat, simultaneously tries his luck with the villainess. He's at pains to assure Irma that he disagrees with those who scorned Dr. Zimmer – which makes him either a romantic opportunist hoping to ingratiate himself with a recently bereaved woman, or some kind of proto-fascist! This undercutting of character is followed through even with minor figures like the hitch-hiker Irma picks up, who lets slip that she "always finds a sucker on the way". Death may seem a steep price to pay for such a minor transgression of manners, but this technique of giving the villains their reasons and the victims their provoking flaws results in a compelling (if rather cold) film, in which there are few straightforwardly likeable characters. The viewer is positioned as an observer of foibles, a witness to crimes and transgressions, while the easy pleasure of audience identification is diverted. It's a technique that would earn many a director brownie-points for 'alienation effect', so it's credit to Franco that he keeps the wheels of pulp-horror turning even as the film employs strategies more commonly associated with 'art' cinema.

Still, let's be clear; despite the script being penned by Jean-Claude Carrière, one of Buñuel's frequent collaborators, *The Diabolical Dr. Z* is no art film wannabe. The questions that arise from Zimmer's experiments, to do with medical ethics and social design, are elaborated purely in a pulp horror context. First seen sticking a syringe into a cat for no apparent reason, 'Dr. Z' himself makes an immediately unsettling impression, and his outlandish, insanely impractical mind-control machine looks like it belongs on a lurid sci-fi paperback cover from the 1950s. Who cares that its most dramatic element – a pair of hydraulic mechanical arms tipped with snappy steel pincers – would be utterly redundant if the professor had just fitted shackles to the operating table! His mind-control technique, which involves shoving steel needles the width of a pencil through a patient's cranium, also seems a little crude, but these are dull, sensible objections, and they have no place here. Franco wants to excite the imagination; he's not really trying to represent the real world.

Here and there in the directorial style there are echoes of the cinema's arch manipulator Alfred Hitchcock, especially in the scene where Irma fakes her own death. As in *Psycho*, with Norman Bates's disposal of Marion Crane, we find ourselves suddenly anxious on behalf of a murderer, as Irma is nearly caught red-handed by two passing fishermen. Afterwards, setting fire to her car with the hitchhiker's corpse inside, she suffers horrible burns to her face and staggers home, sobbing in agony. Despite her wickedness, our pity is once again stirred. But think again! As soon as she's home she subjects her father's devoted servant Barbara to the mind-control device. How unwise we were to waste sympathy on this woman! For budgetary reasons, elegant Hitchcockian tracking shots are rare in Franco's films, but here we see several. Take the scene in which Irma goes swimming in the lake with the hitchhiker, then emerges from the water and runs to her car with murder in mind. See the way the camera waits for her to draw near, and then pulls back in step with her as she hurries to retrieve her gloves from the glove compartment. Her urgent, nervous energy is tangibly conveyed. Similarly, the arrival of Bergen inspires a gorgeous ground-level tracking shot as this predator brought low is dragged unconscious into the house by Irma and Barbara.

In a film with so many set-pieces it's difficult to say which is best, but for me it's the scene in which 'Miss Death' is attacked by Irma and Bergen in a deserted theatre. It's choreographed like a bad dream, a delirium of cramped confrontations and awkward tussles. When Irma switches on the theatre lights she seems to flick the switch for sound as well: a free jazz squall assaults our senses, like John Coltrane preparing for take-off. Another highlight comes when one of Zimmer's nemeses, Moroni, is chased through a mist-shrouded village at dusk. It's a scene of astonishing Gothic beauty that equals anything by Bava, Freda or Margheriti. There's the unusual stage act of 'Miss Death' herself, who wriggles along the floor playing spider on a painted web with a bound mannequin in the centre. We see eyes moving behind the dummy's mask – but

from whose point of view? Subsequent shots reveal that the dummy is just that, a mannequin, with no one inside. And yet we *saw* those eyes move! It's an eruption of the uncanny that presages much that will obsess Franco in the years to come. Finally there's the surgical scene, in which Irma operates on her own horribly burned face, using a mirror and scalpel, slicing into her cheek and lifting a flap of scar tissue as blood trickles from the wound. It's grotesque, it's disgusting, it's gratuitous and, need I add, quite wonderful. It's the sort of thing Franco no doubt wanted to do in *The Awful Dr. Orlof* (remember that shot of Dr. Orlof's scalpel approaching a victim's face?) but for some reason couldn't or wouldn't. Four years later he's feeling bolder, times have changed, and he's going for the money shot. And while Franco cannot always be relied upon for gory delights, this was strong stuff indeed for the time.

*The Diabolical Dr. Z* arcs back and forth between broad brushstrokes and a layered sense of irony. As a story it may have little to 'say', but in its construction, appearance, and use of character it reveals the hand of an aesthete. So many trashy horror flicks have set out their commercial wares in the 'mad doctor' subgenre: very few reveal such a stylish and seductive watermark when you hold them up to the light.

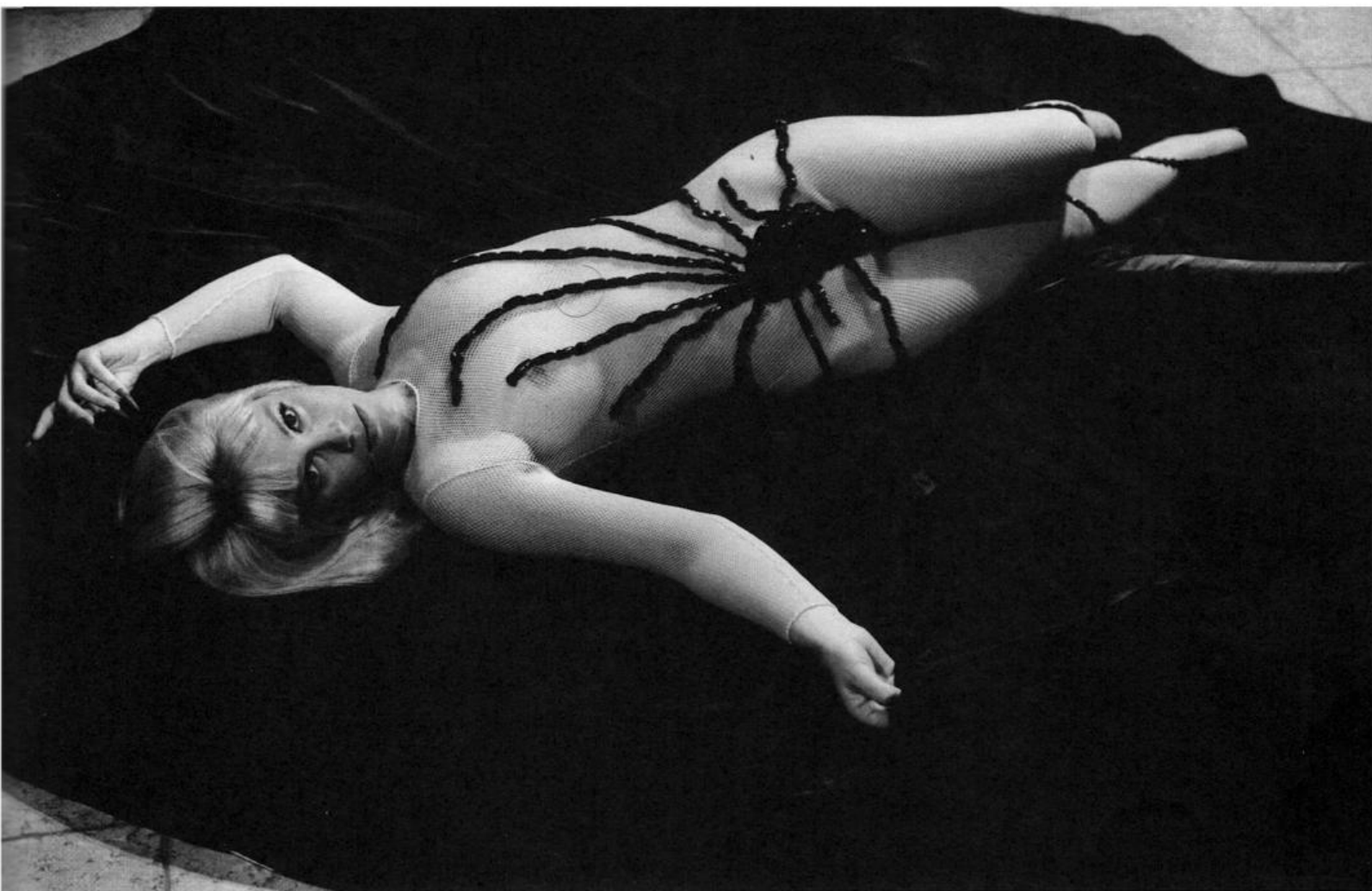
**Franco on screen:** For the first time, Jess Franco steps out from behind a musical instrument and plays a significant character, Inspector Tanner, brought in from Scotland Yard while suffering from sleeplessness due to the recent arrival of triplets (policemen all had these little quirks in the Euro-thrillers of the 1960s and 70s). He banters with fellow police detectives (sample line: "*If Vicas's wounds were caused by an animal, it is an animal with nails very long, very hard and poisoned – and do wolves walk around with poisoned nails?*") and curiously, given Franco's generally amoral screen appearances later on, brings an end to the villainess's plans with his gun.

**Cast and crew:** Estella Blain (aka "*The beautiful and voluptuous Miss Death*") was born Micheline Lestellat on 30 March 1930 in Ile-de-France, Paris. Tragically, after her film career stalled during the 1970s, she went through periods of severe depression. Holding on long enough to help her son Michel to establish himself in the film industry, Estella killed herself with a gunshot to the head on the 1 January 1982 ... Argentinian actress Mabel Karr (the wicked Irma) was born four years earlier than Blain, on 7 October 1934, and made very few films in the fantastique or exploitation genres; she appears in Sergio Leone's *The Colossus of Rhodes* (1961), Joaquín Luis Romero Marchent's violent Western *Cut-Throats Nine* (1972) and Alberto Sciamma's daft *Killer Tongue* (1996), but apart from these she preferred comedies and dramas ... Co-writer Jean-Claude Carrière started his film career as an associate of 'the French Buster Keaton', Pierre Étaix, working on his Oscar-winning short *The Anniversary* (1962) and the feature *Le Soupirant* (1962), the latter a French remake of Buster Keaton's 1925 comedy *Seven Chances*. In 1964 he wrote the screenplay for Luis Buñuel's *Diary of a Chambermaid*, based on Octave Mirbeau's novel; it was the first









*Facing page, clockwise from top left: Dr. Zimmer (Antonio Giménez Escribano) with his daughter Irma (Mabel Karr) and servant Barbara ... Moroni's wife Sandra gets caught up in the vendetta against her husband ... Irma plots vengeance with escaped killer Hans Bergen (Guy Mairesse) ... murders a hitch-hiker ... and trains 'Miss Death' in her duties ... Bergen escapes from prison.*  
*This page: Miss Death in full regalia ... Barbara inserts a needle into Bergen's skull ... In the hands of Miss Death, Moroni (Marcelo Arroita-Jáuregui) begins to regret his attack on Dr. Zimmer.*







of six script assignments for the Surrealist master, the others being *Belle de jour* (1967), *The Milky Way* (1969), *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (1972), *The Phantom of Liberty* (1974) and *That Obscure Object of Desire* (1977). Carrière's writing career has seen him work with a dazzling array of art-house big names, including Louis Malle, Jacques Deray, Marco Ferreri, Volker Schlöndorff and Franco's favourite, Jean Luc-Godard.

**Music:** Daniel White gives Franco one of his very best scores, based around a mournful and oddly disturbing melody for trumpet and harpsicord. As in *The Awful Dr. Orloff* and *Dr. Orloff's Monster*, there's quite a bit of rummaging around inside pianos, with strumming and scraping of the strings, and much gleeful chaos. Elsewhere we get xylophone, wordless female vocals, church organ and sundry percussive clanging, an unsettling and enthralling sound adventure that really ought to be on vinyl by now. White also plays Inspector Green, sidekick to Franco's Inspector Tanner (apparently British police inspectors travel in pairs, like magpies).

**Locations:** The locations where Franco shot the film are hard to pinpoint, and it's just as difficult to say where it's supposed to be set diegetically. In the English language version, Franco and Daniel White play two Scotland Yard detectives; the police at the scene of the crime, however, are dubbed with American accents. In the French version, Franco and White are still from Scotland Yard but the rest of cops are French. The notice advertising *Miss Death's* stage show is in German, as is the sign for a tavern, so we're evidently supposed to be somewhere in either Germany, Switzerland or Austria. But where? And what are Scotland Yard, the French and the Americans doing there? The nameplate outside Zimmer's residence says he's a professor of the University of Breslau - but is that Breslau as in Wrocław, the Polish town, or Breslau, the German exonym for the parish of Braslava in Latvia? Zimmer's country residence is in Hartog, the same fictional town mentioned in *The Awful Dr. Orloff*. Two different number plates on cars featured in the story give us the possible location of Holzminden in Lower Saxony - but after killing Vicas, Nadia disembarks from a train at Singen, a town near the German-Swiss border hundreds of miles away. Once again we're in a pan-European netherworld of Franco's devising, where nationalities are nebulous and cops from one country casually investigate crimes in another!

**UK theatrical release:** As *The Diabolical Dr. Z* the film was submitted to the BBFC with a running time of 86m08s, but cuts were made before an 'X' certificate was granted on 23 March 1967. See Appendix for details.

**Connections:** *The Diabolical Dr. Z* revisits the mind-control theme of *Dr. Orloff's Monster*, while tidying up its plot and swapping the gender of the killer, thus providing a template to which Franco would return again and again over the next thirty years (see *She Killed in Ecstasy*, *Nightmares Come at Night*, *Shining Sex*, *Voodoo Passion*, *Mil sexos tiene la noche* and *Sola ante el terror*) ... Doctor Orloff himself is mentioned by name despite not featuring in the story in person, contributing to a network of traces and connections

that will proliferate between many of Franco's future films (the method is strikingly similar to that employed by the American writer H.P. Lovecraft - see *Succubus*) ... With his unusual dark glasses, wheelchair, and hunched spider-like body language, Dr. Zimmer is reminiscent of the eponymous *Dr. Strangelove* (1964), another fascist who believes that his extreme methods are for the greater good when in fact they're simply manifestations of an amoral will to power. And there's another Kubrickian connection: Zimmer's stated aims suggest that Franco and Carrière were fond of Anthony Burgess's 1962 novel *A Clockwork Orange*, which of course Kubrick filmed six years later ... When Irma Zimmer lures Nadia to a phony address before abducting her, a plate on the wall outside the offices announces "M. Saffra", a reference to the film's co-producer ... The theme of facial surgery will reach its apotheosis in the grisly horrors of *Faceless* (1987), the culmination of Franco's Orloffian saga and the last film to feature the character.

**Other versions:** Although there appear to be no alternative edits of this film (except for the original Spanish version *Miss Muerte*, which shies away from depicting Irma's facial surgery), there is at least one difference to the dialogue in the Spanish and French versions, a detail first pointed out in Alain Petit's *Manacoa Files* and then brought to my attention by American critic Tim Lucas: when Irma Zimmer is on the phone at the start of the film, she is talking to a mysterious person called 'Bresson' who informs her that "*Un condenado a muerte se ha escapado*": literally "a condemned man has escaped". The combination of name and statement suggest the French director Robert Bresson and his finely tuned masterpiece *A Man Escaped* (1956). On a related note, the 'man escaped' is called Hans Bergen; there was in fact a real Hans Bergen: a heavily decorated German soldier of the Nazi Party who was captured by the Allies but released from prison in 1947.

**Problematica:** Although listed in many sources, actors José María Prada and Alberto Dalbés do not in fact appear in the film. Similarly some sources (including *Obsession*) credit the actress Ana Castor; however Castor, who was to play Irma Zimmer, was dropped shortly before shooting commenced because she refused to appear in the second half of the film with burn make-up on her face. Franco told Alain Petit, "*I replaced her with Mabel Karr. I have nothing to complain about - because Karr emanates a disturbing eroticism that now seems preferable to Ana Castor.*"<sup>3</sup> ... English-language prints incorrectly credit production manager Henri Baum as director.

**Press coverage:** *El Mundo Deportivo* took a positive view of *Miss Muerte* (while minting their own unofficial variant on the Orloff film series!): "*'Miss Muerte' is a new attempt by Jesús Franco in the difficult genre of horror. Franco's excellent cinematographic theories do not always bear fruit in reality, but it is clear that the specialty has led to some interesting titles ('The Testament of Dr. Orloff' especially). In the same category can be labeled 'Miss Death', a story of the revenge carried out by the daughter of a scientist, which gives Jesús Franco the occasion to put into practice his skill and knowledge of the trade.*"<sup>4</sup> ABC Madrid went into more detail: "*Jesús Franco does not hide the fact that the*

sole purpose of his films is to entertain the viewer. 'My eternal project,' he has written, 'is simply to amuse. As a director, the derogatory adjective 'commercial' fills me with joy.' True to his claims, he has handled, one after another, films that are undisputably formulaic but which gross effectively and play to an audience that does not demand much effort. Miss Death is one of the most skilful productions of this filmmaker, who is one of the few Spanish cinéastes to see their often noteworthy films scheduled on European billboards ... Jesús Franco has achieved a technically sober film which suffers in its plotting. The story is weak, and after the first thirty minutes one's interest wanes because we sense the outcome. However, deft direction makes the viewer remain in his seat without tiring, in front of this amalgam of situations and characters that adds nothing to the genre, but which is skillfully conducted and handled."<sup>5</sup> ABC's Andalusian correspondent concurred: "Jesús Franco scores a good achievement with the direction of this horror movie, which without having an effective plot has unique narrative values that make us follow the situations and characters with growing interest. The screenplay by Jean-Claude Carrière [...] allows Franco to demonstrate his analytical skill in making the viewer follow the complicated incidents, immersed in the unlimited sensationalism with which Dr. Irma plans her vindictive crimes ... The narrative is full of typical horror cinema effects, with certain allusions to eroticism, which, although slight, are treated with great skill, and succeed in keeping the viewer intrigued with the course of events. In short, if the film suffers from some storyline faults they are overcome by an effective production with good atmospheric tension, in which Franco's skill effortlessly reaches high levels of effect."<sup>6</sup>

## ATTACK OF THE ROBOTS

### Spain & France 1965

Spanish depósito légal number: M-4129-1966

French visa number: 30979

*Original theatrical title in country of origin*

**Cartas boca arriba** (SP theatrical) *Cards Face Up*

**Cartes sur table** (FR theatrical) *Cards on the Table*

*Alternative titles*

**James Clint sfida Interpol** (IT theatrical) *James Clint, Interpol Challenge*

**Karten auf den Tisch** (GER theatrical) *Cards on the Table*

**Kortene på bordet, Eddie** (DEN theatrical) *Cards on the Table, Eddie*

**Kaarten op tafel** (BEL theatrical) *Cards on the Table*

*Production companies*

**Hesperia Films** (Madrid)

**Speva Films** (Paris)

**Ciné Alliance** (Paris)

*Theatrical distributors*

**CEPICSA** (Madrid)

**SNC - Société Nouvelle de Cinématographe** (Paris)

*Timeline*

Shooting date	18 Oct - 30 Nov	1965
French visa issued	09 March	1966
France premiere	15 March	1966
West Germany	29 April	1966
Madrid	01 August	1966
Seville	20 January	1967
Italy (Rome)	28 June	1967
USA TV screening (Texas)	06 October	1967
Belgium (Antwerp)	24 October	1968

*Theatrical running time*

Spain	92m
France	94m

*Cast:* **Eddie Constantine** (Al Pereira, Interpol agent). **Françoise Brion** (Lady Cecilia Addington Courtney). **Fernando Rey** (Sir Percy). **Sophie Hardy** (Cynthia Lewis). **Alfredo Mayo** (Chief Inspector Baxter). **Marcelo Arroita-Jáuregui** (Olsen, Interpol agent). **Mara Laso** (blonde Portuguese 'robot'). **Vicente Roca** (Lee Wee, crime syndicate boss). **Antonio Giménez Escribano** (General Crosby). **Dina Loy** (brunette robot). **Ricardo Palacios** (Hermes, Mexican tourist). **Aida Power** (blonde robot). **Ramón Centenero** (Oscar Hawkie, agent caught at airport). **Antonio Padilla** (dead agent in bath). **Ángel Menéndez** (Alan Maxwell, US consul). **Lorenzo Robledo** (Commissioner Molinski). **Gene Reyes** (Lee Wee henchman - supposedly 'Chang Howe'). **Lemmy Constantine** (little Agent X-3). *uncredited:* **Antonio Pica** (cardinal's assassin). **Jess Franco** (Bourbon's Club pianist/Alphaville trailer narrator). **José Luis Zalde** (older bellboy).

*Credits:* director: **Jess Franco**. original story by **Jess Franco**. adaptation & dialogue by **Jean-Claude Carrière**. director of photography: **Antonio Macasoli**. editor: **Marie-Louise Barberot**. art director: **Carlos Viudes** / **Jean d'Eaubonne** [FR prints]. music by **Paul Misraki**; producers: **Michel Safra**, **Serge Silberman** [FR prints]. production supervisor: **Luis Laso Moreno**. production manager: **Henri Baum** [FR prints]. unit manager: **Ricardo Bonilla**. location manager: **Germán Quejido**. production administrator: **Robert Demollière** [FR prints]. administrators: **Jacqueline Dudilleux**, **Jean van Praag** [FR prints]. production secretary: **Odette Darrigol**. 1st assistant director: **Pierre Lary**. 2nd assistant director: **Luis Revenga**. continuity: **Lucia Martín**. camera operator: **Roger Delpuech**. 1st camera assistant: **Julio M. Leyva**. still photography: **César Benítez**. assistant film editor: **Monique Teisseire**. set construction: **Tomás Fernández**. property master: **Germán Quejido**. properties &





furniture: **Jesús Mateos**. special effects: **Manuel Baquero**. dresses: **Dorothée Bis** [FR prints]. seamstress: **Manolita Iglesias**. make-up: **Emilio Puyol**. hair stylist: **Mercedes Guillot**. assistant make-up: **Regina Ortiz Sesé**. wardrobe: **Cornejo**. laboratories: **Éclair Laboratoires** (Épinay, Paris); **Arroyo** (Madrid). sound recordist: **Jacques Gérardot**. sound re-recording: **Estudios Vallehermoso** [SP prints]. sound mixer: **Louis Hochet** [FR prints]. *French version* post-synchronisation: **Société Lingua Synchrone & SIMO**. music publisher: **April Music** (France). *English-language version* dubbing: **S.P.S. – Société Parisienne de Sonorisation**. *uncredited*: producer **Carlos Courret**.

**Synopsis:** *Brainwashed robot-like men and women, with strange darkened skin and identical black-framed spectacles, are committing assassinations around the world. When captured, they refuse to give up their secrets and often die, reverting to Caucasian skin colour as they do so. One-time secret agent Al Pereira is forcibly persuaded out of retirement by his former employers Interpol to investigate a spate of disappearances involving people with the rare Rhesus-Zero blood type. A recent kidnap victim, the musician Yves Barriel, has been spotted in Alicante, so Pereira is sent there as bait for the kidnappers. Before the brainwashers can get hold of him he's abducted by the servants of Lee Wee, a Chinese crime syndicate boss who is trying to trace the organisation behind the 'robot' killings in order to obtain their technology. It transpires that the mind control technique only works on people with Rhesus-Zero blood, hence the disappearances being investigated by Pereira. The mastermind of this cunning plan is the villainous Lady Cecilia Addington Courtney, who along with smitten sidekick Sir Percy runs the robot scheme on behalf of The Upper Circle, a shadowy worldwide crime organisation. Pereira meets and grows friendly with an English female agent, Cynthia Lewis, but can she be trusted? And who is the fat, aggressive man who keeps trying to punch him whenever they meet? Pereira is attacked by the hypnotised Yves Barriel, who has just murdered Olsen, another Interpol agent on the case. Pereira kills Barriel with a harpoon gun. Suspecting that the glasses worn by the assassin hold some kind of secret, Pereira puts them on, only to find himself mesmerically compelled to return to the villains' base. Imprisoned there, he is spotted by Cynthia, who is also being held. She removes the glasses, thus freeing Pereira from the hypnotic influence. Confronting Lady Cecilia, Pereira seduces her and pretends he's willing to change sides, knowing that Sir Percy is watching. The enraged Percy, believing he's being cuckolded, tries to shoot his 'love rival' but the bullet hits Cecilia. In the ensuing confusion, Cynthia and Pereira make their escape while the secret base blows up around them...*

**Production notes:** In October 1965 production was under way in Madrid on the second Carrière-Franco script, *Cartas boca arriba*.<sup>1</sup> Released in the USA as *Attack of the Robots*, the story reconfigures the mind control theme of *The Diabolical Dr. Z* for the spy-fi adventure genre. According to a news item in *Variety*, female co-star Sophie Hardy was involved in a near-fatal motor accident during the shooting, after which she was in a coma for

48 hours. Three weeks of treatment and observation later she was given the all-clear to resume filming. Co-producer Carlos Courret of Hesperia Films told the reporter that the whole affair required a two-week addition to the schedule.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, *Cartas boca arriba* opened in Madrid cinemas on 1 August 1966, a fortnight before *Miss Muerte*.

**Review:** A pair of villainous super-criminals turn human beings into automatons to further their dreams of world domination, and the only man who can stop them is secret agent Al Pereira, played here by Eddie Constantine in an unofficial rerun of his famous 'Lemmy Caution' character (see 'Connections'). Coming as it does, hot on the heels of the sublime *Diabolical Dr. Z*, this is a major disappointment. Nothing, not even the title, seems to work. Released in Spain as *Cartas boca arriba* and in France as *Cartes sur table* (in both cases meaning 'Cards on the Table' or 'Cards Face Up'), the phrase is virtually meaningless in relation to the story. No one 'comes clean' in the film, in fact quite the contrary: the criminal masterminds remain enigmatic throughout. Apart from the vague suggestion of a 'showdown', the title seems to have little connection to events. No wonder that American distributors AIP ran with the brazenly misleading moniker *Attack of the Robots*, a valiantly crude retitling that attempts to seduce the curious with pulp sci-fi promises.

But we're not really dealing with robots. These are simply brainwashed people who, for reasons that are never explained, turn dark-skinned when under mesmeric influence, then revert to their original pigmentation when they die. They're controlled by means of a device implanted in the spectacles they wear, a visual motif that could have been milked for menace and surreality but which is pretty much thrown away, thanks to a humdrum directorial style that seems only fitfully alive to the visual possibilities.

Because the 'attackers' in the film lack menace, one must turn to the good guys for sustenance, which brings us to Eddie Constantine. He makes his first appearance playing roulette with a sexy brunette at his side, and if you think that sounds very much like James Bond, well you're right. Constantine's persona is that of the laconic secret agent with a girl in every port and a taste for the finer things, a man for whom crime-fighting is slotted in at convenient intervals whilst living it up in glamorous international locations. But the rictus of irony with which Constantine mugs through the action soon grows tiresome, and you long for the character to meet his match instead of strolling so casually through the various threats and contrivances. He never seems to be in any real danger; the game we're watching has no teeth, and we're left wondering why we should care if the character fails or succeeds.

*Attack of the Robots* has moments of frivolous panache but mostly there's a sort of clumsiness, as if the production is trying to catch a butterfly in an iron fist. It's rudimentary as a comic-strip adventure and lacks the witty script that could have kept things afloat. Instead we have a combination of hectic action and plodding longeurs, with

drawn-out dialogue scenes that suck energy out of the story. The humour is surprisingly broad, based around slapstick and farcical situations; for instance, a young Ricardo Palacios (in the first of his numerous roles for Franco) plays a comic character intent on landing a punch on Constantine but destined to ending up either flat on his ass or falling into the sea. At times like this the film has more in common with the unsophisticated Italian comedy of Franco & Ciccio than the spy spoofs of Britain or America. Every now and again a scene achieves the sublime silliness required (Vicente Roca as Chinese crime boss Lee Wee gives the film a much needed blend of urbanity and steel), but the connective tissue, of which there is far too much, is dry and uninspired. The principal villains are neither interesting nor credible, despite being played by two very capable actors, Françoise Brion and Fernando Rey. Brion at least gets to slap unprotesting 'robots' in the face, generally camping it up as a frosty man-hating bitch, but Fernando Rey is wasted, given a desperately underwritten role as Brion's lover-cum-sidekick Sir Percy. It seems odd to cast a man fêted for his work with Buñuel, and then fail to give him anything significant to do! But that's *Attack of the Robots* all over; too many cast members are left dangling, thrown into the mix with little design or purpose. Antonio Giménez Escribano for instance, plays a General who sends Agent Al Pereira into the field as bait for the killers, but he never gets a satisfying confrontation scene with the man he's manipulating. Likewise, the villains act on behalf of a shadowy world organisation called 'The Upper Circle', but their leader is neither a sinister *éminence grise* nor a featured character, just an ordinary middle-aged actor seen in fleeting long shot. The film needs a good rant from Brion or Rey, putting some flesh on the bones of their crazy schemes. Such a scene might have prevented the climax from fizzling so grievously.

Franco had been crossing the Spanish border to watch French films since his late teens, and was by now very well aware of the French New Wave, a movement whose genre-quotational habits perhaps offered an endorsement of his own magpie nature and emboldened him to work in a more parodic style. On the 5th May 1965, a month or so before *The Diabolical Dr. Z* went before the cameras, the New Wave's leading light, Jean-Luc Godard, released a quasi-pulp sci-fi crime story called *Alphaville*, featuring Eddie Constantine as Lemmy Cauton and Howard Vernon as a sinister scientist, in 'une étrange aventure' that quoted but transcended various film genres. Godard employed the topography of sci-fi, film noir and detective fiction with knowing irony, drawing these ready-made style templates into new forms. It's surely no accident that Franco's films soon after begin to flirt more directly with this same tendency (thanks to Alain Petit for pointing out that the voice we hear on a speaker system when Pereira arrives in Alicante is actually Franco, drumming up business for *Alphaville*: "le grand film de Jean-Luc Godard avec Eddie Constantine et Anna Karina!"). Nevertheless, it's worth pointing out that Franco's feature debut *Tenemos 18 años*, and his parodic musical *Vampiras* 1930, had already highlighted genre clichés in a stylised, self-conscious way.

Franco was an ironist, with a sardonic eye for genre tropes, but he lacked the commitment to verbal anarchy that would sustain an out-and-out comedy. He's too sophisticated for slapstick alone; instead he hankers for the witty repartee of classic Hollywood or the urbane banter of the British spy story. Yet for some reason – perhaps the haste with which the project was written – *Attack of the Robots* seems unable to sustain the necessary level of invention (a significant share of the blame here must be laid at the door of esteemed co-writer Jean-Claude Carrière, whose game is distinctly under par). Seen in its French version the film has moments of charm, but there's definitely something missing; I suspect the problem is that, as we saw in *El Llanero*, Franco cannot really rouse himself for his male heroes as passionately as his females, with the result that the stylistic equivalent of a Gallic shrug seems imprinted in the film's DNA.

**Cast and crew:** Playing Franco's second Al Pereira (after Conrado San Martín in *La muerte silba un blues*), Eddie Constantine is the big hitter in the cast, at least from a French point of view. A major movie star in France in the 1950s, he never really struck a chord in the UK. To my eyes he comes across like Roger Moore's uncle with a bit of Bob Hope thrown in, and bears an unfortunate resemblance to *On the Buses* star Reg Varney ... Constantine's young son, named Lemmy after his father's most successful screen character, has a small role in the film as a boy secret-agent and turns up again in *Residencia para espías* ... The glamorous and energetic Sophie Hardy, who does her best with the underwritten role of ingénue spy Cynthia Lewis, went from spicing up scenes with Eddie Constantine to roaming London with Sid James in *Three Hats For Lisa* (1966). The actress, who oscillated between movies and topless modelling, had previously starred alongside Constantine in the 1964 spy romp *Jeff Gordon, Secret Agent* aka *Des Frissons partout*. She once complained, "Producers see nothing but 'sex-appeal' – useless to tell them that I am also a good actress..." ... Art director and set decorator Carlos Viudes here began an association with Franco lasting five films, including *Succubus* and the two 'Red Lips' films. Assistant director Pierre Lary had recently been Luis Buñuel's assistant on *Diary of a Chambermaid*, and went on to fulfil the same role on Buñuel's *Belle de jour*, *Tristana* and *The Milky Way*. **Music:** Paul Misraki was fresh from Godard's *Alphaville* when he scored this film, but the well seems temporarily dry as he trots out a selection of mundane jazz-inflected cues.

**Studios:** Filmed at Estudios Ballesteros (Madrid).

**Locations:** The Peñón de Ifach, a huge tooth of limestone rising 332 metres above the shoreline near Calpe in the province of Alicante, features for the first time in Franco's cinema, being the base for the villainous Cecilia's operations. It can be seen looming on the skyline in countless Franco films of the 1970s and 1980s.

**Connections:** *Attack of the Robots* sees Franco using motifs from the contemporary fantastical wing of the spy genre, hard-boiled detective stories, film noir, and last but not least France's popular 'Lemmy Cauton' thrillers. Based on a series of books by crime



writer Peter Cheyney, the Lemmy Caution films, beginning with *La Môme vert-de-gris* (1953), featured Eddie Constantine as a spy who, to quote critic James Travers, “*was the absolute personification (at least in the eyes of a French man or woman at that time) of an American hard man, oozing charm, sex appeal and machismo in every sinew of his being, one who spoke French fluently, albeit with a ‘slight’ American accent.*”<sup>4</sup> ... Mind control continues to preoccupy Franco, having already featured in *Dr. Orloff’s Monster* and *The Diabolical Dr. Z* ... One particular line of dialogue (“*Pereira used to be one of the very best. He’s the one who caught Paul Vogel – remember?*”) points the way forward to Franco’s exorbitantly sleazy *Exorcism* (1974), in which the director himself played Paul Vogel, a defrocked priest and murderous sexual maniac ... Villainous Chinese criminals would pop up again in Franco’s Fu Manchu films, and sundry 1980s low budgeters like *La sombra del judoka contra el Dr. Wong* (1982), *En busca del dragón dorado* (1983) and *Esclavas del crimen* (1986) ... “*How many James Bond films have you seen recently?*” asks Pereira to an Interpol operative showing him deadly devices concealed inside the usual array of domestic objects.

**Other versions:** The American export edition is currently available only in a monstrously ugly transfer on the grey market. Atrociously pan-and-scanned, and struck from a fusty old print, it’s little wonder *Attack of the Robots* has garnered few fans over the years. Fortunately a gloriously clear and well-framed DVD edition has recently surfaced in France, adding not only a wealth of visual detail (information is reinstated on all four sides of the frame), but also a handful of extra scenes and shots. Firstly, when Al Pereira (as he’s referred to in the French edition) is seduced and knocked unconscious by a living statue, he’s transported by Chinese thugs to an opium den via canal-boat, a brief but picturesque journey missing from the American version. The English-language dubbing ‘robotises’ the hypnotised drones: in the French version they are referred to as “Monsieur No.1”, “Monsieur No.2”, and so on; in the American version they are “Robot No.1”, etc. When Pereira attends a nightclub, the first onstage number he sees in the French edition is omitted from the English-language cut; it features Cynthia wearing a chiffon scarf and a skintight body stocking cavorting to a latin-jazz number. Later, when Cynthia tries to gain entrance to Al Pereira’s hotel bathroom, claiming she’s in desperate need of a bath to help her sleep, the English-language version snips out an amusing insult: Pereira, who has a dead body stashed in the bathroom, offers to lend Cynthia a novel by French avant-garde novelist Marguerite Duras, which he assures her will send her to sleep in seconds! The scene also loses a quip in which Pereira likens the proliferating corpses in his hotel room to a waxworks exhibition. Finally, the French cut includes almost a minute of Cynthia, topless, but with her breasts out of frame, taking a bath after the removal of a corpse from the bathtub; also snipped from this scene is Pereira, in the adjoining room, discovering that the hypno-spectacles he took from the victim have been stolen, a detail which suggests Cynthia may be in league with the villains.

**Problematica:** The IMDb currently adds the following (unconfirmed) cast member: Manuel Vidal.

**Press coverage:** *ABC Madrid* liked the film, saying “*Eddie Constantine achieves here, via the hand of Jesús Franco, one of his best performances of recent years.*”<sup>5</sup> *El Mundo Deportivo* commented that “*Jesús Franco has directed with his usual mastery*” and complemented Antonio Macasoli’s photography of the Alicante coastline and composer Paul Misraki’s “*inspired melody*”<sup>6</sup>; *La Vanguardia* felt that “*Jesús Franco directs the film with skill*” but added: “*Cartas boca arriba has as its protagonist the invincible Eddie Constantine in a different kind of story than the actor’s usual roles, who, although contributing dynamism and humour, does not manage to shine as in his previous films.*”<sup>7</sup>

## GOLDEN HORN

### Spain 1966

Spanish depósito legal number: M.15.408-1966

*Original theatrical title in country of origin*

**Residencia para espías** (*Boarding School for Spies*)

*Alternative titles*

**Golden Horn** (English-language theatrical export)

**Ça barde chez les mignonnes** (FR theatrical)

*That Poet among the Cuties*

**Les Mignonnes** (IT theatrical [sic]) *The Cuties*

**Eddie Afslører Orient-Banden** (DEN theatrical)

*Eddie Exposes the Orient Gang*

**Hedef Istanbul** (TURK theatrical) *Target Istanbul*

**La Corne d’Or** (alt. FR theatrical title in Turkish listings)

*Golden Horn*

*Production company*

**Hesperia Films, S.A.** (Madrid)

*Theatrical distributors*

**Mercurio Films, S.A.** (Madrid)

*Timeline*

Shooting date	June - August	1966
Madrid premiere	22 January	1968
French visa no. 34191 issued	06 March	1968
France	21 March	1968
Seville	19 April	1968
Turkey	22 April	1968
Barcelona	20 May	1968

*Theatrical running time*

Spain	89m
France	87m

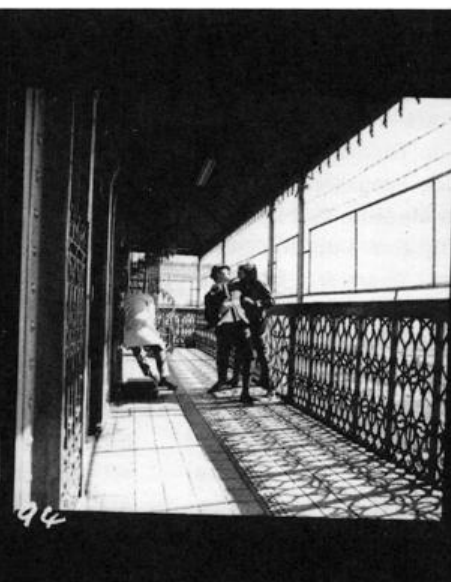
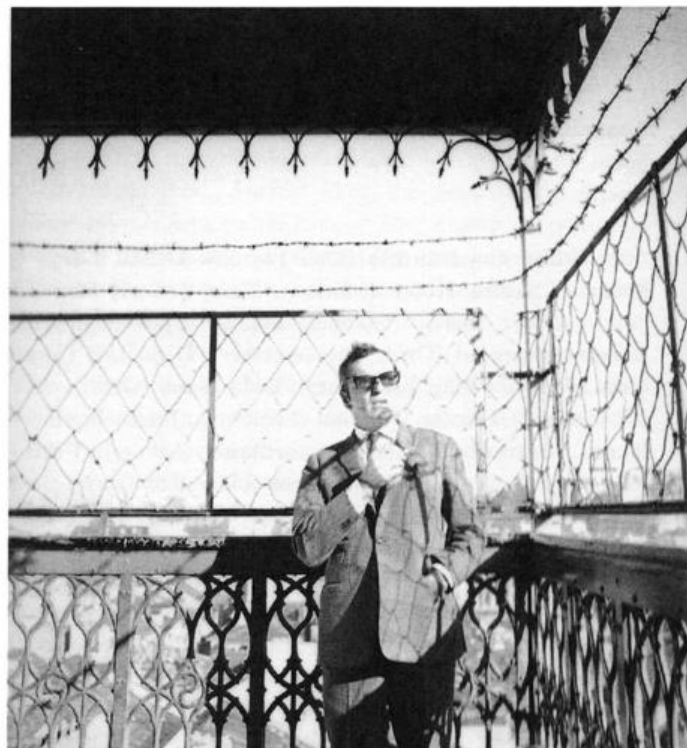
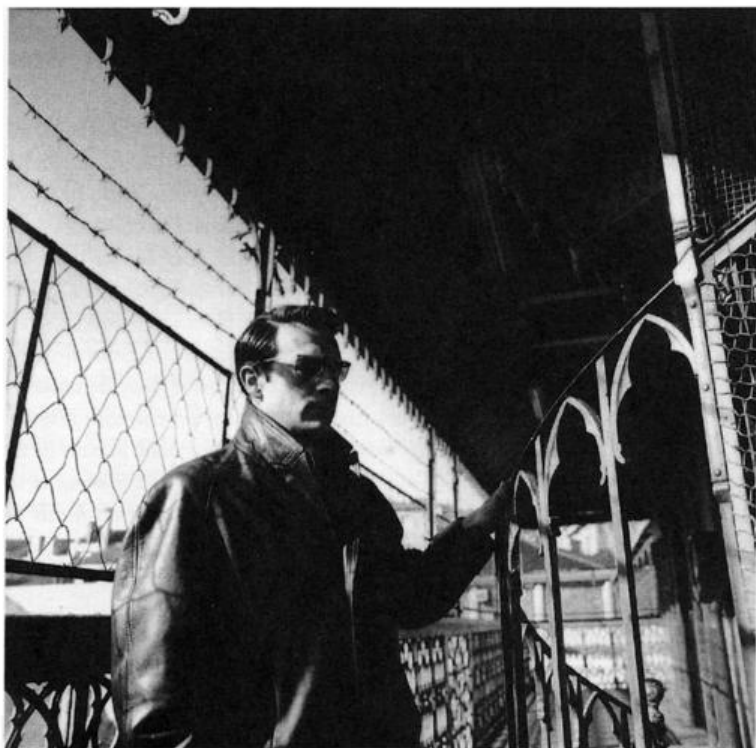
*Cast:* **Eddie Constantine** (Dan Layton). **Diana Lorys** (Janet Spokane). **Anita Höfer** (Marion). **Mary [Mari] Paz Pondal** (Ilse). **Otto Stern** (Colonel Freddy Spokane). **Marcelo Arroita-Jáuregui** (Omar, the caretaker). **Dina Loy** (Yasmina). **Cris Huerta** (Willy, bar owner). **Lola Gaos** (Omar's wife, the housekeeper). **Héctor Quiroga** (Lieutenant Jimmy Smith). **Nora Romo**. **Antonio Giménez Escribano** (Monty). **Pilar Vela** (Sofia's mother). **Gonzalo Esquiroz** (older of two men who attack Layton in Captain Hunter's room). **Tota Alba** (Commander Pendleton). *uncredited:* **Howard Vernon** (Mr. Radeck, Layton's Lisbon contact). **Patty Shepard** (student in spotted bikini). **Johanna von Koczian** (Dr. Lehmann). **Charle Fawcett** (Dr. Kalisar, radiographer). **Lemmy Constantine** (messenger boy). **Jess Franco** (pianist at casino). **Rafael Vaquero** (Charlie, outraged American delegate at UN). **José Villasante** (doorman). **Nieves Salcedo** (woman who escorts Layton to Pendleton's office).

*Credits:* director: **Jess Franco**. screenplay: **Jess Franco**; based on the novel [*Dan Layton chez les Chatelaines*] by **Charles Exbrayat** [as 'Michael Loggan']. director of photography: **Antonio Macasoli**. editor: **Magdalena Pulido**. art director: **Antonio Simoni**. music by **Odón Alonso**, based on Turkish folk themes. producer: **Luis Laso [Moreno]**. location manager: **Germán Quejido**. 1st assistant producer: **Ricardo Bonilla**. 2nd assistant producer: **Fernando Quejido**. assistant director: **Luis Revenga**. continuity: **Ángela Cristóbal**. camera operator: **Ricardo Andreu**. 1st camera assistant: **Fernando Perrote**. 2nd camera assistant: **Javier Argote**. still photography: **Enrique Montoya**. assistant editor: **Maruja Soriano**. assistant art director: **Rafael Ablanque**. set dresser: **Carlos Viudes**. set construction: **Tomás Fernández**. properties & furniture: **Jesús Mateos**. special effects: **Manuel Baquero**. seamstresses: **Manuela Iglesias**, **Rosina Fernández**. make-up: **Adolfo Ponte**, **Manuela García-Fraile**. assistant make-up: **Tomas Benito**. hairdresser: **Inés González**. clothes supplier: **Cornejo**. filmed in 'panoramica' [widescreen]. colour: **Eastmancolor**. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid, S.A.**. sound recording: **Estudios Vallehermoso**. *uncredited:* producer **Carlos Couret**.

**Synopsis:** During a fractious UN meeting it's revealed that six aircraft equipped with fuel for atomic missiles have been sent to Istanbul. This information can only be the result of a leak from U.S. intelligence in Istanbul. The CIA send their best agent, Dan Layton, to unmask the traitor. He is despatched from New York to Lisbon to rendezvous with an agent called Radeck. Radeck is attacked by two assailants and asphyxiated with a poisonous drug just before Layton arrives, but as he expires he tells him to go and meet Colonel Spokane at the Istanbul Hilton. Spokane, an

old friend of Layton's and head of the Department of Communications, informs him that the prime suspect has now been arrested; Lieutenant Jimmy Smith, aide of the Chief of Counter-Espionage Captain Anthony 'Rock' Hunter. During the visit, Layton makes the acquaintance of Janet Spokane, Freddy's seductive wife. Spokane tells Layton that he suspects the security leak originates from the American-sponsored 'Haliç International Residence for Young Ladies', where Smith's girlfriend Sofia lived. Sofia has since gone missing. Spokane instructs Layton to take a job as assistant to Haliç's Commander Pendleton to look for clues to the identity of the traitor. Layton first goes to question Captain Hunter but finds that he and his girlfriend Eva Lock have been murdered in their home. He then visits Jimmy Smith in prison; Smith is shocked to hear that Hunter and Lock are dead. From the prison Layton heads to Haliç and meets Omar the butler and the authoritarian Commander Pendleton, a stern and formidable woman in her fifties. Afterwards he bumps into his old flame Marion, who's also been sent undercover to Haliç posing as a teacher. Spokane shows Layton a letter written to Smith by Sofia, in which she tells him she's a foreign agent who has been summoned back home, but Layton suspects the letter has been planted to implicate Smith. Layton visits Smith in prison for a second time and shows him the letter; he says it's a forgery ... Further killings take place before Layton discovers the truth and unmasks Colonel Spokane as the traitor; Spokane has been selling American state secrets to redeem his wife's enormous gambling debts. Layton confronts the Colonel, who commits suicide to avoid the shame of a conviction.

**Production notes:** Franco's father Emilio Franco Martin died on the 3rd April 1966, and his mother, Dolores Manera Custardoy, followed just five months later, on the 27th September. These two blows sat on either side of a difficult shoot re-uniting Franco with Eddie Constantine for a second spy romp, *Residencia para espías* aka *Golden Horn*. Production got underway in Madrid in June 1966<sup>1</sup> before heading off to Alicante for location work on 22 July<sup>2</sup> and Istanbul for further shooting in early August.<sup>3</sup> However *Residencia para espías* was a troubled production. Early on, arrangements between Serge Silberman's French production company Ciné-Alliance Films and the Spanish Hesperia Films broke down, with Silberman dropping out. During the crisis, Franco struck up a friendship with Karl Heinz Männchen, a German born producer he met in the offices of Hesperia; Männchen had lived in Madrid since the mid-1940s, working as a production manager, and was an experienced production partner in Spanish-German co-productions. Franco asked him to try and secure German co-financing for *Residencia para espías*. Taking a punt on the outcome of their conversation, Franco began shooting in Istanbul before the German money was confirmed; unfortunately Männchen was unable to secure any. When Spanish funds ran out, star of the project Eddie Constantine provided completion money. The film did eventually see release in France, as could be expected with such a popular actor in the lead, but the financial debacle finished off Franco's association with Hesperia Films, and Constantine.<sup>4</sup>



Top row: the shooting of additional scenes for *Golden Horn* took place during production of *Succubus*, featuring this unnamed actor (left) as the assassin and Howard Vernon (right) as his secret agent victim. *Succubus* was shot chiefly in Lisbon, Portugal; the location used for the additional *Golden Horn* material was Lisbon's dramatic Santa Justa Elevator.

Middle row: This contact sheet from the *Succubus* shoot clearly shows that production stills for the additional *Golden Horn* shoot were sent to be developed at the same time, as seen by the number sequence which interpolates images from the two films.

Bottom row: Jess Franco directs an action scene at an unknown location with three unnamed actors in *Golden Horn*, including (right, in military cap) a stand-in for Eddie Constantine. The scene to which these images relate takes place very briefly and in long shot in the finished film (at least as currently seen on video and DVD - it's possible the theatrical cut was different).

All images courtesy Uwe Huber.





**Review:** Another day another spy movie. *Golden Horn* (aka *Residencia para espías*) is a curiously lukewarm experience. It feels detached, blunted, as though reported to us by a third party. For a secret agent yarn it's too talky, for an action-adventure it's too slow, for a thriller it's too disjointed and lacking in tension, and for a frothy spy-comedy it's too morose and half-hearted. The humour comes and goes, or peters out for long stretches, as if Franco is unsure how to pitch the film. Should we take the spy thriller elements at face value, or are we meant to keep one eye on the genre's clichés and half a smile on our faces? *Golden Horn* seems to have suffered a crisis of confidence in its tone and general approach, something that may be linked to its unsettled production background, and perhaps to Franco's personal difficulties at the time (see 'Production notes').

Constantine plays a CIA agent sent to Istanbul to sniff out a mole who's been passing American military secrets to the enemy. Along the way he gets into the customary fist fights, searches for clues along a trail of dead bodies, and fends off the amorous wife of a key contact. Yet despite excellent location work in Istanbul it all seems rather lacklustre. *Golden Horn* desperately needs a stronger narrative to anchor its wandering tone. With Constantine, hardly the most expressive of actors, mooching half-heartedly through the lead role, there's little to grab onto. The humour revolves chiefly around the central conceit that this rather plain middle-aged man is catnip for the various bathing beauties and beehived vixens who fill out the female cast. With so many women around, the focus of attention veers naturally towards the feminine, but one of most frustrating things about *Golden Horn* is the lack of development in the female roles. The girls just keep on coming, so to speak, but they're mostly window dressing, and they frequently trail away into the background after an attention-grabbing introduction. The exceptions are Anita Höfer as Marion, Layton's lover and female confidante, who play a jealous shrew-in-waiting (despite being introduced by Layton's voice-over as "my future better half" we never see their marriage fulfilled), and Diana Lorys as Colonel Spokane's sultry man-hungry wife, who grabs the attention with simmering sexuality and cheekbones that could slice paper. The beautiful Patty Shepard pops up in a polka-dot bikini for a brief hello; vivacious Mari Paz Pondal is likewise denied much impact despite a major plot point hinging around her involvement; and sundry other girls flit in and out of the story without touching the sides. Like a lot of Franco's 1960s films, there are more characters onscreen than the script knows what to do with. It's actually the older women who stand out the most, especially Lola Gaos, an extraordinary-looking character actress who brings a bony birdlike intensity to the role of the sinister housekeeper. Also worth mentioning is Tota Alba as Commander Pendleton, whose gender is kept from Layton until he opens the door of her study; expecting some crusty old military duffer, he's confronted instead by a hawkish middle-aged woman whose hair is pulled back so tight her face could deflect bullets.

The troubled production of the film is evident from various editing quirks and non-sequiturs. For instance, a scene in which Eddie Constantine and Cris Huerta drive to a dockside for a secret rendezvous, only to find the place staked out by Bulgarian soldiers who open fire on their car, is conducted without the lead actors appearing in a single shot with the extras. The encounter was evidently patched together in the editing room to make up for a lack of suitable footage. In an early scene, Layton receives a letter from his superiors telling him to meet a man called Radeck (Howard Vernon) at the Santa Justa elevator in Lisbon. By the time he arrives there, Radeck has been beaten and mortally injured; before he dies he whispers the words "*Istanbul ... Hotel Hilton ... Spokane*", leading Layton to Turkey and the rest of the plot. This scene, the only one shot in Lisbon, and the only one featuring Vernon, seems shoehorned in; sure enough, when Layton arrives in Istanbul and meets Spokane, no mention is made of either Radeck or the nature of their encounter. It seems that the Vernon scene was spliced in later, perhaps to pump in some much-needed action or to expand the running time; one suspects that in the original cut, the letter received by Layton (unreadable onscreen) simply told him to meet Spokane in Istanbul.

Thematically, *Golden Horn* is as flimsy and two-dimensional as it is narratively slow and complicated. Layton is acting on behalf of the CIA, who are concerned that secrets are being leaked to 'someone', although the film deliberately avoids naming a country. The delegate who speaks against the Americans in the prologue at the UN ("*We have information that the Americans have cheated us again. Turkish politicians, as always with the approval of international capitalism, have this time received fuel for nuclear missiles!*") does so in a Slavic tongue, probably Bulgarian given later revelations in the plot; the secrets being leaked involve intelligence about American military incursions into Soviet territory, which they vehemently deny at the United Nations but admit in private. Don't go looking for a tongue-in-cheek satire of Cold War foreign policy, though, because despite the prologue setting up the idea, it never really goes anywhere. The same is true for the 'residencia' setting; at first there seems to be a structuring tension between the free-spirited young lovelies who fill the place and the repressive old women who run it. Both Lola Gaos and Tota Alba have scenes in which they berate the younger women for their licentiousness, and they repeatedly catch Layton eyeing up the girls or manoeuvring into clinches with them, all of which could have signalled that the film had more on its mind than a few secret agent clichés. If the espionage story had been a front, with the film delving into generational tensions and women's restricted sexual freedoms in Spain in the mid-1960s, it might have gained more traction. As it is, the repressed and repressive Commissioner Pendleton eventually softens for the convenient purpose of making Layton seem heroic. And the depiction of Layton himself is hardly progressive; he dallies with young women left right and centre, he's caught smooching with a semi-clad lovely by his 'better half to be', yet still he adopts a staunchly moralistic

attitude when Spokane's wife indicates she's looking for extra-marital thrills, actually slapping her when she makes an advance. Maybe this is what audiences expect from the man who played tough guy Lemmy Caution, but it's less than endearing in a film already suffering from a deficit of likeability.

Caught in the right mood one day, it's possible that *Golden Horn* would make diverting afternoon TV fare. There's a reasonably inventive pay-off regarding coded messages readable only by X-Rays, with the X-Ray machine also doubling as a murder weapon, and an exciting punch-up in an abandoned pool-room used as a chicken-coop (although I do worry about the poor chickens caught in the mêlée). The glamour of the girls is undeniable, and I suppose that's really where the film lives (just don't expect any nudity; it's strictly swimwear and evening dress). In any other sense, *Golden Horn* is as inconsequential as it is inoffensive.

**Franco on screen:** Franco can be spotted playing the piano at the casino where Layton sees Janet Spokane losing money.

**Cast and crew:** Tota Alba, the stern and severe Commander Pendleton, had previously acted alongside Jess Franco in Fernando Fernán Gómez's black comedy *El extraño viaje* (1964), in which they played brother and sister. The same year as *Golden Horn* she lent her striking features to Santos Alcocer's *El enigma del ataúd*, released in France as *Les Orgies du Docteur Orloff* thanks to the presence of Howard Vernon (although the film has zero connection to the Franco Orloffs). Alba's other screen appearances include playing a devil-worshipping child-stealing witch in Amando de Ossorio's *La endemoniada* aka *The Possessed* (1975), a noblewoman in León Klimovsky's *Strange Love of the Vampires* (1976) and another witch in Paul Naschy's *Inquisition* (1976). Lola Gaos, here playing the wife of Marcelo Arroita-Jáuregui, worked twice for Buñuel, in *Viridiana* (1961) and *Tristana* (1970), appeared alongside Soledad Miranda in a trashy horror flick about an invisible dinosaur (!) called *El sonido de la muerte* (1966), found herself menaced with an open razor in Tonino Valeri's accomplished giallo *My Dear Killer* (1973) and played a purveyor of love potions in Jorge Grau's treatment of the Countess Bathory legend, *The Female Butcher* (1975). She would work for Franco once more, appearing as an elderly witch in the fantasy film *El lago de las vírgenes* (1981).

**Music:** Argentinian-born Adolfo Waitzman provides a gorgeous Arabic-inflected score which adds some much-needed lustre to the production. He would go on to work with Franco again on *Al otro lado del espejo* in 1973. Among his other credits are the amusing Paul Naschy flick, *Dr. Jekyll vs. the Werewolf* (1972), the superlative horror film *A Bell from Hell* (1973), and Francesco Barilli's sorely under-rated rural horror mystery *Pensione paura* (1977). He is also celebrated among record collectors for his breakbeats, which have been sampled by many a hip-hop producer.

**Studios:** Filmed at Estudios C.E.A. (Ciudad Lineal, Madrid).

**Locations:** Istanbul & Haliç (Turkey), Ahtopol (Bulgaria), the Santa Justa Elevator (Lisbon, Portugal), Madrid and Alicante (Spain) and at Estudios C.E.A. (Ciudad Lineal, Madrid, Spain).

The title *Golden Horn* refers to the scimitar-shaped peninsula (called Altın Boynuz in Turkish) at the inlet of the Bosphorus, the tip of which is Old Istanbul.

**Connections:** 'Dan Layton' was the recurring hero in a series of books by 'Michael Loggan', actually a pseudonym for a collaborative series of pulp novels written by Charles Exbrayat (author of *Vous souvenez-vous de Paco?*, filmed by Franco as *Rififi en la ciudad*) and Jacques Dubessy. The specific 'Loggan' book Franco appears to have drawn upon for *Residencia para espías* is *Layton et les Chatelaines* ('Layton and the Ladies of the Manor' – note that 'Chatelaines' is the feminine plural of Châtelain, the French equivalent of the English 'Castellan', i.e. the commander of a castle). It was published in 1964 as part of the well-known *Le Masque* imprint ... Captain Hunter goes by the nickname 'Rock Hunter', as seen in a signed photograph dedicated to his friend Jimmy Smith ... After breaking into an inappropriate ragtime blues on the church organ, Layton claims to be the cousin of Louis Armstrong ... The fact that the traitors turn out to include a radiologist whose medical expertise is crucial to the plot suggests that the death of Franco's radiologist father three months earlier was still very much in his mind.

**Other versions:** A currently elusive French version, *Ça barde chez les mignonnes*, released in 1968, is said by some to include additional footage with Michel Lemoine, supposedly filmed in 1967 on the set of *Succubus*. However, Alain Petit in *The Manacoa Files* states categorically that this was not the case. Howard Vernon's scene was certainly added during the *Succubus* shoot (see photos on p114), although his brief appearance can be found in the Spanish-language video release. The current absence of an English-language version is regrettable, although one was certainly produced; Turkish advertising for the film's 1968 release in Istanbul refers to the film being in "Colour - English - Widescreen", so it appears such a print was indeed struck ... Was the sepia-tinted prologue, seen in the Spanish video and DVD releases, a part of the original theatrical release? Note that the calendar on the wall behind Rafael Vaquero, who plays Charlie the American UN delegate, reads Friday May 2nd. In 1966 (the year the film was shot) the 2nd of May fell on a Monday. The closest year in which the 2nd of May fell on a Friday was 1969. Was this perhaps when the prologue was added?

**Problematica:** The IMDb currently adds the following (unconfirmed) cast member: Manuel Vidal.

**Press coverage:** The film was released to warm reviews in Barcelona: "a new movie of intrigue, action, and a great preponderance of visual charms. These include, firstly, many beautiful girls, usually dressed very skimpily ... Constantine plays the role with his usual ease, alternately smiling and punching, breaking free of all traps and triumphing over all rivals. Eddie Constantine is always true to himself. What made his early films continues here - poise, grace and cynical charm."<sup>5</sup> Another declared, "Action is non-stop, intense, and full of extraordinary suspense in this film directed with great intelligence by Jesús Franco."<sup>6</sup>

## LUCKY THE INSCRUTABLE

Spain & Italy [& West Germany] 1966

Spanish depósito legal number: M-693-1967

*Original theatrical title in country of origin*

**Lucky el intrépido** (SP) *Lucky the Intrepid*

**Agente Speciale L.K. (Operazione Re Mida)** (IT)

*Special Agent L.K. (Operation King Midas)*

**Lucky M. füllt alle Särge** (GER) *Lucky M. Fills all the Coffins*

*Alternative titles*

**Unternehmen Midas** (GER shooting title)

**Operation Midas** (English-language shooting title)

*Production companies*

**Atlántida Films, S.A.** (Madrid)

**Dauro Film** (Madrid)

**Fono Roma** (Rome)

**Explorer Films 58** (Rome)

**CCC Filmkunst** (Berlin)

**Telecine Film- und Fernsehproduktion GmbH** (Berlin) [uncredited]

*Theatrical distributors*

**Iberica Films** (Spain)

**Rank Film** (Italy)

**Eckelkamp Verleihgesellschaft mbH** (Düsseldorf)

*Timeline*

Shooting date	Oct-November	1966
Italian censor certificate	14 June	1967
Italy premiere (source: <i>Gramesi</i> )	23 June	1967
Rome (source: <i>l'Unità</i> )	22 July	1967
German censor certificate	31 August	1967
West Germany	01 September	1967
Seville	18 December	1967
Barcelona	01 January	1968
No evidence of Madrid release		

*Theatrical running time*

Italy	92m
Spain	91m
West Germany	88m

*Cast:* **Ray Danton** (Lucky the Inscrutable). **Dante Posani** (Michele). **Barbara Bold** (Conny Candy from Copenhagen). **Beba Loncar** (Beba, Michele's Serbian girlfriend). **Rosalba Neri** (Yaka, head of Albanian secret police). **María Luisa Ponte** (Madame Linda from Kashmir). **Héctor Quiroga** (Sergei, 'Tovarich', Soviet spy). **Marcelo Arroita-Jáuregui** (Hermann

Goldglasses, counterfeiter). **Dieter Eppler** (Hans, assassin with bad cough). **Teresa Gimpera** ('Cleopatra' at masked ball). **Antonio Sempere** ('Archangel' executive). **Vicente Roca** ('Archangel' functionary). **Mike Brendel** (heavyset Goldglasses henchman). **Antonio Padilla** (Alexei Merzicanos, Soviet spy). **Francisco Ortuño** (Pierrot at masked ball). **Antonio Taño**. **Rafael Vaquero** (man murdered in hotel room). **Nuria Gimeno** (Brunehilde, shepherdess). **Manolo [Manuel] Vidal**. **Rosana Gonzálo**. *uncredited:* **Jess Franco** (blind man selling postcards knifed in back/Zoltan, Hungarian itinerant on Albanian train/guitar player at Lo Pagán [three roles]). **Patty Shepard** (telephonist). **Jesús Guzmán** (hotel receptionist). **Rafael Albaicín** (Goldglasses henchman in wide-brimmed hat).

*Credits:* director: **Jess Franco**. story: **José Luis Martínez Mollá**, **Julio Buchs**. screenplay: **José Luis Martínez Mollá**, **Julio Buchs**, **Remigio Del Grosso**, **Jess Franco**. director of photography: **Fulvio Testi**. editor: **Antonietta Zita**. set designer: **Carlos Viudes**. music composed by **Bruno Nicolai**. executive producers: **Luis Méndes**, **José Frade**. production supervisors: **José Luis Jerez Aloza**, **Pasquale Petricca**. production managers: **Luis Méndez**, **Angelo Corso**. unit managers: **Marino Méndez**, **Paolo Scagnoli**. location managers: **Francisco Pol**, **Joaquín Nieto**, **Luigi Polinesi**. assistant director: **Luis Revenga**. continuity: **Gloria Roldán**. camera operator: **Jorge Herrero**. camera assistants: **Saturnino Pita**, **Salvatore Caruso**. still photography: **Magdalena López**, **Aldo Rossi**. set construction: **Tomás Fernández**. special effects: **Antonio Molina**. seamstress: **Rufina San Juan**. make-up: **José Echevarría**, **Antonio Mura**, **Marcello Ceccarelli**. hair stylist: **Gloria Castellanos**. wardrobe: **Peris Hermanos** (Madrid). filmed in **Techniscope**. colour: **Technicolor**. laboratories: **Fotofilm Madrid & Technicolor** (Rome). sound re-recording: **Voz de España & Fono Roma S.p.A.**. sound: **Augusto Troiani**. dubbing: **S.A.S.** [IT prints]. soundtrack released on **Discos R.C.A.** [SP prints]. music publisher: **G.E.M.** [IT prints]. "We thank the company of the Hotel Entremares de la Manga del Mar Menor for their co-operation during the shooting of this film. Also our thanks to the board of the Casino de Murcia." *uncredited:* German co-producer: **Artur Brauner**.

**Synopsis:** *In a London hotel, a man carrying a suitcase full of dollars is murdered by a killer with a heavy cough, who sets fire to the cash. At a posh society party, secret agent 'Lucky' is persuaded by the shady global organisation Archangel to find out who is responsible for the appearance on the world financial market of millions of fake dollars. His investigation leads him to Rome where, at a busy market for international spies convened at the Coliseum, he hooks up with Michele, a handsome young Italian agent. Between them they learn that the counterfeiters are based in a factory in Albania. Travelling to the communist country by private plane they are hit by mortar fire; Lucky and his companion parachute to the ground and continue their investigations. They discover that the*



counterfeit plates have been moved to another location, the Spanish island of Lo Pagán. There they make contact with the female owner of a nightclub with unsavoury criminal connections, and with the help of a beautiful dancer they finally trace the evil organisation. However, all is not as it seemed; Lucky discovers that Michele is a double agent and the Archangel organisation are crypto-fascists...

**Production notes:** In February 1967, Franco's debut feature *Tenemos 18 años* scored a few play-dates in Madrid for the first time, even playing two theatres simultaneously (the San Remo and the Ibiza). However, it was of little but sentimental interest for Franco at the time. Things were moving on. During the sixties the Spanish film industry made regular co-production deals with Italy, and it was from Italy that the lion's share of financing for Franco's new project emerged. Another spy story, this time in an overtly satirical vein, *Lucky the Inscrutable* featured studio material shot in Rome and location work in Rome and Spain. Filmed during October and November of 1966, *Lucky the Inscrutable* was released first in Italy, on 23 June 1967, while the Spanish premiere took place in Seville on 17 December that year. Thanks no doubt to Karl Heinz Männchen, the film was also distributed theatrically in West Germany, a market that would become increasingly important to Franco in the next few years...

**Julian Grainger's review:** *Lucky the Inscrutable* comes as something of a surprise: it's a Bond-esque comedy-caper whose chief pleasures come from the energetic performances and amusing dialogue rather than action. Franco's take on the genre is typically contrary, working as it does against the standard genre conventions: rather than portray Lucky as the archetypal suave and sophisticated international fixer of cinematic repute, Ray Danton clearly enjoys himself playing Lucky as a bit of a tosser but with a nice line in self-deprecation. His costume is deliberately ludicrous: his shirt bears an enormous 'L' on the front, his red pants are worn outside of tights (à la Superman) and he sports a glittering red cape with a rather camp raised collar. Lucky is even happy to pass the usual bevy of beauties onto Michele (Dante Posani) since, according to Danton, he's younger and prettier.

The New York-born Danton brought certain audience expectations to the film. Although acting on both the big and small screen since the beginning of the 1950s, his first real hit wasn't until 1960 when he played the title role in Budd Boetticher's terrific prohibition-era crime film *The Rise and Fall of Legs Diamond*; a role the actor repeated the following year in the Dutch Schultz biopic *Portrait of a Mobster*. *The Rise and Fall of Legs Diamond* was a big hit in France, Germany and Italy and Danton followed actors like Lex Barker and George Nader into a series of popular action-adventure films, which then morphed into a series of popular secret agent films after the enormous success of *Goldfinger*.

Franco begins the film in the style of a German *krimi*, with sinister Dieter Eppler warning off a group of street toughs before

shooting dead a secretive-looking man (Rafael Vaquero) in his hotel room. In a rather nasty touch, he sets fire both to the body and the large suitcase full of cash. The presence of Eppler, as Goldglasses' under-the-weather assassin Hans, and vivacious blonde Barbara Bold as (believe it or not) an SS transvestite, reveals the presence of German finance - specifically Artur Brauner - a fact that goes curiously unremarked upon by the Spanish, Italian and English-language prints, nor even the German poster.

The title sequence, featuring a bored-looking woman dancing listlessly in front of a full-length mirror, is enlivened by Bruno Nicolai's lively theme song (*Lucky! Boom-boom.*) but is then followed by some drab-looking (stock?) footage of a street carnival in, of all places, Luxembourg. Some of the participants wear masks and Franco uses this as a segue to a long sequence set at an opulent and colourful masked ball featuring many extras. Various significant characters are introduced, in particular the Russians, however their faces are covered and with no exposition delivered up to this point, we have no idea who they are and what they represent. It isn't until Lucky finds his way to a secret society of financiers called 'Archangel' that his mission - and the film's plot - is finally revealed. But the actor charged with delivering this vital information (Antonio Sempere), his face covered by a veil, speaks rapidly with a strong, cod German-Jewish accent so the audience is left little the wiser. Franco couldn't care less about the plot and doesn't mind us knowing it. At the film's climax it is revealed that Conny really works for someone named Kaplan and we've not heard of this character before...

The point is that Franco deliberately and consistently confounds the audience's expectations: exterior action scenes such as the flight to Albania and the chase across the hills, usually the mainstay of such genre titles, seem both dull and colourless, and are given little coverage by Franco's roving camera. At this stage of his career, it would seem that Franco was no more comfortable with action-movie tropes than Mario Bava was with those of the western - it's the interior cave scenes that wow the viewer in 1964's *The Road to Fort Alamo*, not the exterior gunfights and Indian attacks - but the Spaniard's film-making choices are quite obviously deliberate.

And the dialogue really is unusually witty: Lucky says to Conny when she recognises him, "You recognised me? How can you recognise me with this disguise on? It's one of my most famous disguises. I wore it in 'The Case of the Hairless Beetle'" and later, when Goldglasses euphemistically informs him that this is his last adventure, Lucky is indignant: "The last?" he retorts "What's the idea? I've got a contract for five more adventures. You can't cut me off like that." At this juncture, it isn't clear who wrote the English-dialogue but whoever it was did a fine job: a genuinely amusing English re-write of an Italian comedy script was rare.

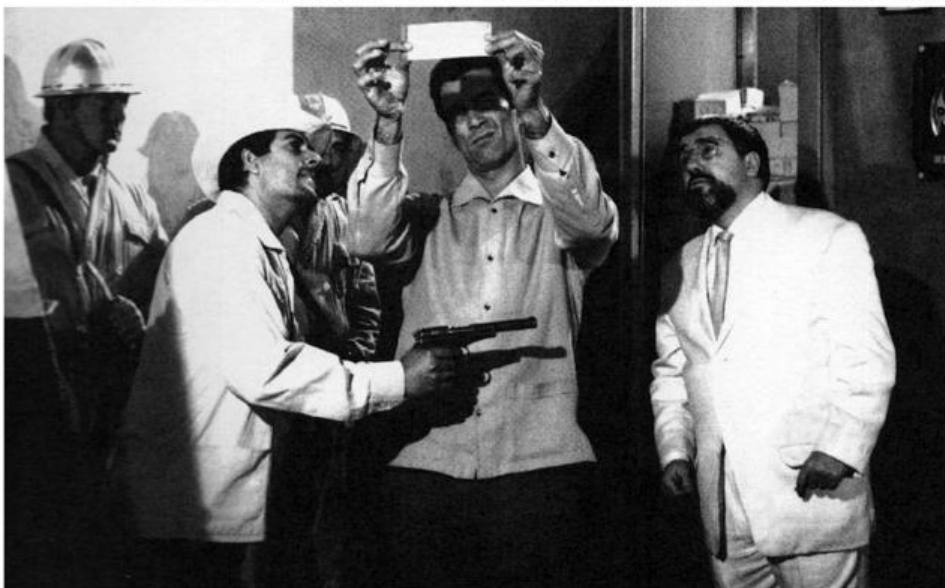
While Danton is good value, the acting honours go to Rosalba Neri as the bad-tempered, sexually-frustrated Albanian chief of police who succumbs only reluctantly to Lucky's charms: "This is only a truce, and tomorrow, if you don't tell me everything I want to





Above: Jess Franco as a contact in Rome passing a message to secret agent 'Lucky the Inscrutable' (Ray Danton)

Below: Lucky inspects the handiwork of counterfeiter Doctor Goldglasses (Marcelo Arroita-Jáuregui). Lucky with Michele (Dante Posani) on the cover of the Italian soundtrack LP





know, you will be shot [l-o-o-n-g pause] ...without a second thought." Later on, she struggles frantically to straighten her jacket and cap before her men re-enter the office, only to realise as she emerges from behind her desk that she is wearing nothing but panties. It's a fine comedic performance and her embarrassment is a delight to behold. Other enjoyable moments include the scene where Beba Loncar – as Michele's fiery lady-friend – has been knocked down in the street; everyone gathers around expectantly for her crucial final words – only for her to reveal the license number of the car that did her in. The 'Market of Spies' sequence is particularly well-written and staged, with various characters (hookers, businessmen and the like) furtively approaching one another with their wares: "South Sea Island secrets, Commonwealth secrets..." and "Russian secrets for Chinese secrets..." just like drugs-sellers at a music festival. The final revelation that busty, blonde Conny is really Franz von Transvestite, formerly of the SS, made my day.

The film's original title, *Operation (King) Midas* – presumably referring to counterfeiter-in-chief Hermann Goldglases, played with oleaginous glee by Franco regular Marcelo Arroita-Jauregui – can still be seen as a subtitle – 'Operazione re Mida' – on Italian prints.

**Stephen Thrower's review:** The sixties craze for lightweight spy spoofs gets another whirl of the whisk in this curate's egg of a film. One has to say, though, that a distinct whiff of hydrogen sulphide emerges. Although *Lucky the Inscrutable* is hailed in some quarters as a pop-art comedy triumph (and Franco himself often declared it one of his favourites), I'm afraid I must swim against the tide and say that I find the film almost unwatchable, an excruciating Europudding of failed gags and strained irony.

Franco had already dabbled in the comedy spy subgenre with *Attack of the Robots*, and to a lesser extent *Golden Horn*, but *Lucky the Inscrutable* was clearly intended to stand out, a full-blown comedy satire mixing international locations, comic-strip heroism and absurd, sardonic wit. Released in Italy in the summer of 1967, it should have ridden the spy-comedy wave just as it peaked. Joseph Losey's awkward but star-laden *Modesty Blaise* (1966) had embroiled Monica Vitti, Terence Stamp and Dirk Bogarde in a flamboyant modernist melée (Franco, a fan of Losey, may have been a little better disposed to the film than most critics), but the most obvious inspiration for *Lucky* is Daniel Mann's exuberant *Our Man Flint* (1966) which saw karate-kicking James Coburn cut a swathe as the eponymous action hero in a tongue-in-cheek romp through cascading Bond clichés. Franco's celebrity-lite effort could scarcely be expected to secure him the same international profile, but with a decent script and a willingness to sweat the details he could have moved to a higher commercial level. Instead, as Ray Danton dons a cheap red cape and clowns around with crudely written speech bubbles coming from his mouth (containing flat-footed epigrams like "I'm the King of the Comic Strips"), we're confronted with the Jess Franco equivalent of *Rat Pfkink a Boo Boo*

(Ray Dennis Steckler, 1966). *Lucky*, with its hostage-to-fortune title, stiffed at the box office, and I have to say I can see why.

The film scores just a few laughs along the way, for instance when the hero attempts to prove that he's a 'master of disguise' by simply removing his gimpish superhero costume, only for various characters to recognise him anyway – and I did rather like the scene in which Lucky visits the Coliseum in the pouring rain, only to find that just about everyone strolling around beneath massed umbrellas is a secret agent trying to buy or sell information. But the genuinely funny scenes are few and far between. The entire production creaks at the joints, wheezing where it should sing and thudding gracelessly where it ought to dance. If only the tone had been better judged it could indeed have been the knockabout satire Franco had in mind. Unfortunately, acting styles clash, comic registers grind gracelessly against each other, and the wackiness of the premise feels childish instead of surreal. For example, it takes an excruciating length of 'gag' time for Lucky to realise that a man passing him a coded message is not simply a pushy street vendor with a speech impediment but a victim with a knife in his back.

No shame on Ray Danton, who went on to direct one of my favourite low budget horror films, *Psychic Killer* (1975), but he's terribly miscast here, and very much let down by the script. If he had any hopes for the film, they must have crawled under the table and died as he read his lines over breakfast each morning. So much in this genre relies on sharp, witty repartee, but the screenplay, credited to Franco and three other writers (Julio Buchs, José Luis Martínez Mollá, and Remigio Del Grosso) limps from one corny gag to another. As for the writing process, one imagines a bunch of fusty old industry roués, their best work probably anywhere but comedy, sprawled around a café table on their third bottle of vino, roaring with laughter at their own jokes. I doubt there was ever a rewrite to winnow out the chaff. To be fair to Mollá and Del Grosso, perhaps exhaustion was setting in: Mollá had previously penned the crime spoof *Agente Logan - missione Ypotron* (1966) (and would later redeem himself by co-writing the superlative Lucio Fulci thrillers *One on Top of the Other* and *A Lizard in a Woman's Skin*), while Del Grosso (a regular collaborator with director Giorgio Ferroni) was drafted in on the strength of three previous superspy stories, *Marc Mato, agente S. 077* (1965), *Perry Grant, agente di ferro* (1966) and *Secret Agent Super Dragon* (1966), the latter starring Danton.

After the first half-hour the film settles down a little, dropping much of the failed comic-strip contrivance to become a rather more conventional spy thriller. Even so, convolution stands in for complexity, sundry double-crossing involves characters you've scarcely met, and by the time it's all over you're no closer to giving a damn about 'Lucky the Insufferable' than you were when he first popped up, dressed like a prat in a tea-towel. To summarise, this is as refined a torture as only failed comedy can be, and one of the three or four Franco films I *never* want to see again. To quote Madame Linda, one of the film's plethora of undeveloped characters, "You have gambled against my credulity and lost!"

**Franco on screen:** Unusually appearing in three distinct roles, Franco plays a postcard vendor (stabbed in the back and seen only in profile), a guitar player glimpsed in *Lo Pagán*, and a Hungarian vagrant encountered by Lucky and Michele while hiding on an Albanian goods train. The latter role gives Franco a chance to show off his ability as a character actor, as well as furnishing Danton with a tasty put-down of the director: “*You know something? I don’t trust that fellow. He has a funny smell about him.*”

**Cast and crew:** Ray Danton’s career oscillated between mundane TV excursions for myriad American network shows, and a variety of oddball European movies. He was Sandokan the Great in two back-to-back movies for Luigi Capuano, *Sandokan alla riscossa* (1964) and *Sandokan contro il leopardo di Sarawak* (1964); played super-spies in Maurice Labro’s *Code Name: Jaguar* (1965) and Giorgio Ferroni’s *Secret Agent Super Dragon* (1966); and a “Saint” surrogate in Giancarlo Romitelli’s *Si muore solo una volta* (1967) made immediately prior to *Lucky the Inscrutable* ... The handsome and sorely under-appreciated Italian actor Dante Posani, who plays Lucky’s sidekick Michele, ought to have been as regular a fixture in Italian thrillers as Ray Lovelock or Jean Sorel, but instead his career fizzled after a trio of spy spoofs; Umberto Lenzi’s *Kriminal* (1966), Piero Vivarelli’s *Mister X* (1967) and Franco’s *Lucky the Inscrutable*. His big chance came the year before, in the form of a spaghetti western called *Jim Golden Poker* (1966), a title that, it must be said, promises much, although the film is merely a jumble of clichés.

**Music:** Just as the film has seduced its fair share of fans over the years, the soundtrack too has its admirers, but for me it’s horribly alienating. Surely I need only say “*Shaba-daba-dah!*” and evoke the nightmarish Swingle Singers to explain the twittering inanity that passes for humorous music here? And besides, does not the notion of ‘humorous music’ provoke a grimace from all reasonable people – especially when it’s Italian? Unlike the roughly contemporary Lucio Fulci comedy *Operazione San Pietro* (1968), *Lucky the Inscrutable* does not feature the actual ‘Ward Swingle Singers’, but Bruno Nicolai’s uncharacteristically awful score draws liberally from their lexicon and makes a comic chase over the rooftops of Rome about as endurable as root canal surgery on a roller-coaster. The one silver lining is that *Lucky the Inscrutable* is the film that brought Jess Franco and Bruno Nicolai together. They became firm friends, and Nicolai, a prodigiously talented composer, breathed musical elegance and avant-garde invention into Franco’s *Count Dracula*, *Nightmares Come at Night*, *The Bloody Judge*, *Eugenie* and *A Virgin among the Living Dead*, among many others.

**Studios:** Filmed at Estudios Vallehermoso (Madrid) and Elios Film (Rome). The prints for *Agente speciale L.K. (Operazione re mida)* & *Lucky the Inscrutable* add a third studio: S.C.O. (Rome).

**Locations:** Exteriors were shot in Madrid and the region of Murcia in southeastern Spain. The ‘chase’ scenes by train were filmed on the ‘Sugar Train’ line running through the sugarcane fields between Ciempozuelos and La Poveda (Madrid). Filming also took place in the Sierra Minera (a mining district) and the mining town of

La Unión in Murcia. The key Murcian locations were the city of Cartagena (specifically: Mazarrón; La Azohía; Cabo de Palos; Plaza Héroes de Cavite; Santa Lucía; Calle Real; the Cartagena docks) and the regional capital itself (where shooting took place at the Casino de Murcia). In addition, Franco’s crew visited the island of Isla Grosa, the seaside bay La Manga del Mar Menor (including the Hotel Entremares), and the bay of the hamlet of Portman near La Unión. The scene in which Danton and Posani encounter Franco himself (in the guise of a Hungarian tramp) was shot on the train from Cartagena to Los Blancos.

**Connections:** A veritable avalanche of James Bond parodies packed out Rome’s film studios between 1964 and 1967, although Bond was not the only influence: another was the internationally popular American TV series *The Man from UNCLE*, certain episodes of which were carved up into feature-length ‘movies’ and released throughout Europe between 1965–1968. Future horror maestro Lucio Fulci was among the first to embrace the format, with his Franco & Ciccio farces, *002 agenti segretissimi* (1964) and *002 Operazione Luna* (1965). When it comes to Euro-trash crime capers with comic-strip overtones, it’s a shame Franco didn’t try the alternative angle, with a dashing super-criminal instead of a wisecracking super-sleuth: see *Kriminal* (1966), a confident example of the format starring handsome blonde actor Glenn Saxson (sic), directed with brio by future giallo specialist Umberto Lenzi, or of course that most ravishing of pop-art crime capers, Mario Bava’s *Danger: Diabolik* (1968) ... James Bond was not the only influence on *Lucky the Inscrutable*; comic-strip art was also key to Franco’s approach, signposted by certain contrivances in the film, notably a handful of crude speech bubbles superimposed over the action (Franco’s gradually decreasing enthusiasm for post-production perhaps explains why the speech bubbles are so infrequent and inconsistent; it would have taken a lot of time and money to sustain the idea). It’s worth pointing out that James Bond had made the transition to comic strips very early on; between 1959 and 1966 eight of Fleming’s Bond novels, and three of the Bond short stories, were adapted in comic-strip form by Henry Gammidge and John McLusky, with another one (*Dr. No*) adapted by McLusky and *Modesty Blaise* creator Peter O’Donnell.

**Problematica:** IMDb currently adds the following (unconfirmed) cast members: Cándida Losada Díaz and Luisa Sala.

**Press coverage:** Spanish response to the film was distinctly cool, with this from *ABC Andalucía*: “*Intending to achieve an original and caricatural depiction of the espionage theme, humorous and serious scenes in the movie lack proper coordination. However, the latter half of the film reaches a stronger narrative in some passages, overcoming the messy exposition of the first sequences. We are presented with ‘Lucky the Intrepid’ getting into trouble during his constant travels, but the narration and the personality of the protagonist are by turns grotesque and implausible. In the absence of more singular technical and artistic values, perhaps the best aspects of the film are the splendid photography and the catchy background music by Bruno Nicolai. The endless complications, messy*

sequence of scenes, and the dialogue lacking effective humour, make Lucky's adventures interesting and amusing only in rare occasions."<sup>1</sup>

## SUCCUBUS

West Germany 1967

*Original theatrical title in country of origin*

**Necronomicon**

*Alternative titles*

**Necronomicon "Geträumte Sünden"** (GER poster)

*Necronomicon "Dreamed Sins"*

**Delirium** (IT theatrical)

**Necronomicon** (FR theatrical)

**Sehvet Satusu** (TURK theatrical) *Lust Castle*

**The Green Eyes of the Devil** aka **Green Eyes** (shooting title)

*Production companies*

**Aquila Films Enterprises** (Munich)

© 1969. **Trans American Films** (Los Angeles) [US prints]

*Theatrical distributors*

**Constantin-Film** (Munich)

**Trans American Films** (Los Angeles)

**Oppidan (UK) Ltd** (London) ['David Grant presents']

*Timeline*

Shooting date	early spring	1967
Berlin Film Market screening	circa June/July	1967
West German certificate	25 January	1968
USA	19 April	1968
Italy (Florence)	24 October	1968
Italy (Rome)	31 March	1971
USA (New York)	25 April	1969
Festival du Film Fantastique, Nanterre	16-20 May	1972
France	06 June	1972
French visa no.35027 issued	21 July	1972
UK 'X' certificate issued	24 September	1973

*Theatrical running time*

West Germany	82m
USA	80m
UK	80m59s

Cast: **Janine Reynaud** (Lorna Green). **Jack Taylor** (William 'Bill' Francis Mulligan). **Adrian Hoven** (Ralf Drawes, psychiatrist). **Howard Vernon** (Admiral Kapp). **Nathalie Nort** (Bella, woman

on cross). **Michel Lemoine** (Pierce, Lorna's master). **Pier A. Caminneci** (Hermann). **Américo Coimbra** (crucified actor). **Lina De Wolf** (Eva Brauner). *uncredited*: **Antoine Saint-John** (Hermann's friend at Berlin nightclub). **Dante Posani** (man watching Lorna's nightclub show).

*Credits*: directed by **Jess Franco**. screenplay: **Pier A. Caminneci**. directors of photography: **Franz Lederle**, **Jorge Herrero**. film editor: **Frizzi Schmidt**.\* art direction & set decoration: **Peter Horst Krause**, **Carlos Viudes**. music arranged and orchestrated by **Jerry van Rooyen**. produced by **Adrian Hoven**. executive producer & production manager: **Karl-Heinz Mannchen**. unit manager: **Robert Gaffron**. production assistant: **Robert Busch**. Janine Reynaud's costumes designed by **Karl Lagerfeld**. make-up: **Irmgard Förster**. sound: **Hans Dieter Schwarz**. music scored from the original by **Friedrich Gulda**, in release on SBA-SB 15 097 ST. *Music for Four Soloists and Band*. American version by **Titan Productions, Inc.** (New York); directed by **Terry Van Tell**; editing: **Film Rite Inc.** [\* Note: Jess Franco stated that he and Adrian Hoven edited the film.]

**Synopsis**: Lorna is a nightclub entertainer whose S&M stage act involves the simulated torture and murder of a chained man and woman. She is living with her manager/lover Bill, but has visions/memories of a strange castle by the sea and a dark man who claims to have 'created' her. As the visions blur into reality, Lorna encounters a man called 'The Admiral', and after playing a word association game with him, she murders him. A few days later, while attending his funeral, she reacts with horror to the sight of the body. At a drunken gathering in a nightclub, a passing stranger refers to Lorna as 'Countess' and implores her to remember who she is. During an LSD trip with Bill at a decadent party, the other guests turning into 'dogs' and pretend to eat her. Bill reacts violently when Lorna starts kissing another woman, and drags her away. Visits to a bullying psychiatrist trigger further visions but resolve nothing. Lorna 'visits' the castle of her visions and makes love with a young woman who becomes indistinguishable from the clothes mannequins dotted around the bedchamber – Lorna smashes the 'mannequin'. Bill leaves for Berlin and Lorna follows. For a while, they achieve a state of serenity and they make love. Afterwards, Bill goes to a rendezvous with Lorna's 'creator' – they arrange to shoot her after the completion of her next stage performance. Lorna's act climaxes with the actual murder of the two bound victims, after which she runs outside. As arranged, shots are fired, whilst inside the club Bill contemptuously surveys the two bound bodies. Returning to his new apartment, he is shocked to be confronted by Lorna, lying naked on his sofa. She demands that he kiss her and as he does she pushes a long blade into the back of his neck and kills him. Her 'creator' drives her to the castle of her visions, which she enters...

"Dreams are not merely shadows but have their own important reality and consequences, a truism found not only in Freud but in many works of art – and certain films." – Jess Franco, *Continental Film Review*, 1973.



**Production notes:** *Succubus* initiates a strain of timelessness and erotic surrealism that runs from here on through Franco's best work. Ironically, the project gained impetus from a conflict with the Spanish censors. Franco delivered an original treatment much simpler than the film it would become, but it was explicitly erotic enough to incense the Board. "*The Spanish censors read and reproved the script. Censorship was fucking inflexible back then. Those morons! 'There's a problem with page seven, you're not allowed to shoot the scene crossed out in red' That sort of shit. The German co-producer then suggested that I work on the film just with him and I said, yes, let's go ahead. He gave me total freedom to do whatever I wanted within the confines of the story, and that meant mental liberation for me.*"

<sup>1</sup> The German producer in question was Franco's friend Karl-Heinz Männchen. When a deal with the Spaniard José Frade, one of *Lucky the Inscrutable's* army of executive producers, fell through because of *Lucky's* failure at the box office, Männchen instead put Franco in touch with the actor Adrian Hoven, who'd recently formed a production company called Aquila Films with fellow actor Michel Lemoine. Hoven and Lemoine, together with another wealthy friend, the actor Pier Caminnecki, put up the money for *Necronomicon*.

Some time in the spring of 1967, *Necronomicon* went before the cameras. Little is known about the exact shooting schedule, but the film was ready in time for the 17th Berlin Film Market, a trade event running simultaneously alongside the prestigious Berlin International Film Festival. *Necronomicon* was screened here (not, as is sometimes claimed, at the Berlin Film Festival) some time between 23 June and 4 July 1967. The response was positive although the film was immediately controversial, with sadomasochism and an air of druggy decadence at the edge of what was permissible in 1967. At first only the West German market was ready for it; censors granted a certificate on 25 January 1968 and *Necronomicon* made its commercial screen debut in Berlin on 19 April 1968. Even this was almost a year after its trade screening, a long hiatus at a time when film trends were changing so rapidly. For the Spanish market, the film was impossible to release. Worse than that, despite being a German production, with location shooting in Berlin and Lisbon, the Spanish authorities accused Franco of having shot parts of the film illicitly in Spain. Nothing Franco said could dissuade them from their belief. As a result of this hostility and mistrust he found it increasingly difficult to work in his native land...

**Review:** *Necronomicon*, or *Succubus* as it is more commonly known, is feature film number fifteen from the prolific Spanish wunderkind, but this is *not* just another Franco movie. It is the point at which everything changes, a charged lodestone that transforms his cinema, pointing the way to the manifold wonders of his subsequent career. It marks a decisive shift in his approach, setting in motion a willed drifting apart of the components expected in commercial genre cinema. Prior to this, Franco's

style had matched the demands of the genre in which he chose to operate; the Orloff films are relatively straightforward, the crime thrillers pursue the aims of noir-inflected drama; even *Lucky the Inscrutable*, with its cartoon bubbles, campy excess and glances to camera, plays the comedy spy-thriller game pretty much by the rules, however wacky those rules may be. Only now, in *Succubus*, does Franco pull away from the requirements of genre in search of his own personal vision. With a strong debt to the flourishing European art cinema of Godard, Resnais and Fellini, the plot of *Succubus* is allowed to dissolve in dreamlike ellipses for which there are no straightforward rational explanations. The film is a surrender, on the part of its maker, to the seductive call of subjective perception. Logic is undone, narrative becomes allusive. With *Succubus*, Franco walks through a doorway into a new dimension of his creativity. But if we are to accept, as we're often invited to do, that it's a centrepiece of his cinema, we must ask questions that can stir more problems than solutions. For instance, what are its themes? What exactly *is* this mysterious core around which the myriad stars of the Franco galaxy revolve? His cinema is often referred to as a world in itself, the notion being that it operates as a closed system with its own obscure code of aesthetics. Yet the film is at least partially comprehensible, and it certainly engages with the prevailing cinema trends of the day. So what's it all about?

You could claim that it's about the permeability of reality and illusion, but that's more a description of its topography than a statement of meaning. In fact when you get right down to it, *Succubus* is 'about' little that is tangible at all. Identity? The war of the sexes? A version of the Faust story? One possible interpretation is that it's a case study in paranoia. But these are motifs, not meanings. Those ideas that do emerge seem to spiral away, dissolving into free-associative games and a torrent of tangential references – Godard and Hitchcock, Goethe and Heine, Faulkner and Sade. Often the references seem close to arbitrary. Word association, used in psychoanalysis to elucidate unconscious thought, appears as a self-conscious plot motif in *Succubus* which sends the film trailing off in elusive fragments, and there are times when the ensuing tangle of loose ends feels hopelessly pretentious. Balancing this, almost apologising for it, is Franco's intermittent parody of art cinema's 'search for meaning', while transcending the issue completely is his newly emerging skill for evoking a morbid, dreamlike atmosphere in which rational thought gives way to defocussed reverie as an end in itself.

When first we meet the heroine, she's an erotic performance artiste called Lorna. We see her play-acting the torture and murder of a bound man and woman, although at first the scene could just as easily be some private S&M game sliding out of control into genuine slaughter. But then Lorna takes a bow, and the victims, dripping with fake blood, graciously accept the applause of a small but enthusiastic audience. Cut to Lorna with her boyfriend and

manager Bill, reclining in their apartment after the show. Their relationship is falling into dissolution, captured in the dialogue as Lorna attempts to seduce her less than attentive lover. "*The Queen of dance – the stripper!*", she cries, gyrating provocatively – only to be shot down by his terse reply: "*Old fashioned and boring.*" Apart from earmarking Bill as a bit of a pig, the exchange identifies a recurrent dilemma in Franco's cinema – here is a filmmaker obsessed with sex, and yet the pessimistic shadow of ennui is never far behind. Characterisation is multi-layered throughout: Bill is both dryly amusing and unnecessarily nasty. His drunken remark when a chair collapses – "*The furniture's falling apart – just like I am*" – captures that tendency to specious connections which turns the 'witty drunk' into a fool. Coming as it does, early in the film, it also foreshadows the film's wry, sometimes cynical send-up of art cinema's propensity for earnest dialogue. "*The angel of peace. Huh! How symbolic,*" mutters Bill later, as he drives past a Berlin monument.

In *Succubus* (though less so in *Necronomicon*; see 'Other versions') Lorna's true identity is a question in our minds from the word go: "*I have done well. She is perfect – a disciple who mirrors my own image. The essence of Evil, a Devil on Earth*", intones a Mephistophelian dark stranger (Michel Lemoine) watching her nightclub act in the opening scene. His omniscient declaration comes out of nowhere, but given that cinema tends to prioritise narrators, Lorna ceases to be merely a kinky nightclub performer and assumes a more mysterious role, some sort of metaphysical vessel for an experiment in evil. Afterwards, the same man can be seen at the far edge of the frame, glaring fixedly at the camera as Lorna chats to a friend at the bar, and his face reoccurs in superimposition several more times, a dream figure puncturing the flow of rational information. Later, for instance, he approaches her at a table in a nightclub, refers to her as 'Countess', and implores her to remember who she is. Lorna's relationship with Bill founders on her unwillingness to explain this encounter, setting the scene for the film's perplexing final twist.

Word association is a recurring motif in *Succubus*, starting with a scene in which Lorna visits a psychiatrist called Drawes (played by producer Adrian Hoven) who uses it in a risibly aggressive manner, intimidating Lorna with rapid-fire demands; "*Birds... pachyderms... knives, pencils, bells, cannon!*" The latter words seem chosen for their clichéd qualities; the suggestion seems to be that psychiatry is invasive, hence the preponderance of phallic symbols. ("*I won't answer! Leave me alone!*" Lorna cries.) When asked if she likes going to the movies, Lorna says, "*They bore me*", but concedes, "*horror films are my weakness*". Drawes produces 'Aurora' glow-in-the-dark models of Dracula, The Phantom, Frankenstein's Monster and Godzilla (referred to disparagingly as "*this dinosaur*"), and asks whether they frighten her, but Lorna is unfazed – "*They're all quite sweet.*" (Note that the Aurora models are seen on the mantelpiece in Bill's Berlin apartment later.) The mood changes when Drawes asks, "*And what about this one here –*

*the new one,*" as the face of Lorna's 'creator' fills the screen. From whence does this vision of Lorna's 'creator' emerge? How does the psychiatrist know about him? What is their relationship? How many surrealists does it take to change a giraffe? It is apparently Franco's intention that we should lose our bearings as the film progresses, unable to gauge where truth lies.

As Lorna walks through Lisbon streets in the early morning light, her mood is suffused with an understated listlessness both sensual and melancholic (the ascendant combination in Franco's mature work). Lighting and photographic style enhance the sensation, using grainy stock, hazy soft focus and saturated light levels. We see her, swathed in an exquisite Karl Lagerfeld dress, being driven by a chauffeur to a castle by the sea, every inch the haughty, mysterious 'Countess'. After this non-sequitur diversion, Lorna hurries to an appointment with a friend called 'The Admiral' (Howard Vernon) who hangs out in a bar staffed by nude young men wearing bow ties. An elegant (probably bisexual) gentleman relaxing in his favourite watering hole, he too uses a word association game to interact with Lorna, only this time she participates readily. "*Have you brought the symbols?*", he asks, holding out a top hat into which she drops a handful of pebbles (another of those sarcastic references to symbolism dotted throughout the film). A kind of seduction then begins, as the Admiral draws Lorna into his embrace whilst murmuring associative triggers ... Tarzan, Godard, Faulkner, Henry Miller, Capote, Charlie Mingus, The Story of 'O', Justine, Camus, the unconscious. (The Admiral's line of questioning reveals a lot about the originator, steering relentlessly towards sadomasochism: 'The Story of O' and 'Justine' follow each other, the latter repeated twice). "*Religion*" from The Admiral provokes "*Gomorra... Goethe... Sade... Gomorra*" from Lorna, pointing to a later scene in *Succubus* (though not in *Necronomicon*) in which Lorna is renamed 'Faustine' by her 'creator' in a valedictory voice-over condensing 'Faust' and 'Justine', profane seeker and abused innocent, into a single figure of desire. At the climax of the scene, Lorna murders the Admiral with a long pointed blade, only to awaken back at her apartment with Bill, suggesting that what we've seen was just a dream. Or so it seems, until the couple walk through town and find mourners around a coffin bearing the Admiral's corpse...

*Succubus* draws characters whose very experiences are displaced, a displacement echoed by Franco's technique of using cinematic allusion to decentre the narrative. "*These Lisbon trolleys remind me of San Francisco... have I been there?*", wonders Lorna, as she rides a tram climbing a beautiful hillside. Reality decays into a fairground mirror of memories, an illusion locked within a recollection wrapped in nostalgia for a dream (Franco's conceit here is to echo *Vertigo*, another film about a mysterious female who may or may not be real). Lorna languidly rests her face on a mirror in reference to Cocteau's magical *Orphée* and its shifting poetical realities, or visits a party populated by acid-dropping

sophisticates – pretentious intellectuals reading aloud from novels (Hoven again), tuxedo-clad playboys on the make (co-writer/co-financier Caminnecki), a transvestite swanning around in a chiffon negligée – whose antics are clearly meant to remind us of Fellini films like *La dolce vita* or *8½*. A man approaches Lorna during a stage rehearsal and asks, “Where have you been? Don’t you remember? You don’t have a good memory at all. What about the long nights spent together in Copenhagen?” Lorna replies, “I don’t know you. I’ve never been to Copenhagen; you’re mistaken,” all of which is hugely indebted to Alain Resnais and Alain Robbe-Grillet’s *Last Year at Marienbad*. In addition, Franco injects a scene in which Bill quizzes Lorna about her true identity with a deliberate strain of Godardian parody. The actors deliver their lines and gestures in the style of a speeded-up Mickey Spillane novel (a brief embrace, for instance, which parodies romance between film noir detective and femme fatale suspect). The amused/detached fashion in which the scene is performed is characteristic of Godard. This parody of a parody, and reference to a further reference, may simply be homage, or it could imply a critique of ‘art’ cinema and ‘Modern Art’ in general, reliant as it often is on densely layered allusions to other Great Works. At a party where everyone trips out on acid, becoming ‘beasts’ ready to tear Lorna apart, the psychiatrist Drawes reads aloud from a book, “A spider’s foot, a toad’s belly, a fox’s brain: unfortunately no such animal exists, but there are words to describe them.” There is indeed such a word – ‘chimera’ – and there’s a chimerical design to this film, equal parts nonsense, art and sexploitation. Rather like those taxidermal hoaxes constructed by Victorian fakers, a strange unpredictable beauty emerges from *Succubus*’s lack of coordination, in the manner of the “exquisite corpse” (*cadavre exquis*) beloved of the Surrealists. (And make no mistake, surreal touches abound: at the castle where the Countess lives, a pianist plays Liszt from ‘sheet music’ comprising a book of mathematical pie charts.)

The long and languorous scene between Lorna and an unnamed woman, whose fate it is to be murdered among a collection of mannequins, is a fascinating illustration of the problems relating identity to desire. The visitor is a lesbian and she’s momentarily fazed when Lorna claims she’s always made love to the same woman, in country after country; always “Lorna Green”. “I love anyone and everyone who reflects Lorna Green.” In a clever gambit, the visitor responds by asking, “When you make love to her, of whom do you think?” Lorna responds, “Those who make their mark, whether ugly or attractive. There are many I could choose from.” The woman makes her move, a vulnerability offered in place of defence: “I’d like you to be thinking of me, as you’re caressing her...” Instead, Lorna merely repeats, “There are many.” Full marks to the visitor for trying to overcome the spectre of narcissistic love, but the mistake has been made. She has tried to play Lorna’s game, only to be ejected on the other side of a dream. This section of the film addresses alienation from physical intimacy. One is

left with the feeling that for Lorna, this poor, lustful, desiring woman is just another dummy who has momentarily sprung into psychic half-life. Superimposed onto sexual relations in general, the scene implies that sex is haunted by a willed alienation. The real and the fantastic then collide as the victim sees animated mannequins stalking her through the castle, until Lorna awakens in a room strewn with dummies to find the visitor’s corpse among the plastic limbs and torsos.

Returning to Bill’s apartment, Lorna finds that he’s left her. The story now moves from Lisbon to Berlin, with Franco’s photography emphasising the cool blues and greys of the city. This carefully delineated use of photographic style, with the dream space being Portuguese (soft, warm, hazy to the point of indistinction) and the real world of nightclubs and betrayal German (hard lines, geometric spatial arrangements and cool, clear photography) is the closest thing to a map the film offers. There’s another transition too: for the first time we hear a voice-over from Bill. We see him driving alone, musing on various trivialities and profundities while regretfully poring over the end of his relationship. This adds a third voice to the audio schema, and indicates a significant shift away from Lorna’s subjectivity. What now transpires has all the hallmarks of a paranoid delusion. But who is the paranoiac? Lorna appears without explanation in Bill’s apartment; amazed, he professes relief that she’s back, and declares that he has been unable to forget her. And yet despite these words, we see him plotting to bring about Lorna’s downfall. On a pedestrian walkway overlooking Berlin’s Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church, Bill and the dark stranger discuss what to do about Lorna. We have not seen them together before, and their conversation is bizarre. Both profess love, yet they plan to bring her down. The stranger, seemingly using psychic influence, compels Lorna to murder her co-stars in the S&M bondage stage show, after which Bill frightens her into running away and the dark stranger (offscreen) shoots her dead. This chain of events is extremely confusing and presents serious obstacles to rational explanation. It would seem that Bill wants rid of Lorna in order to be free of wanting her; he also seems glad to be rid of the female stage performer whom Lorna murders (he blows smoke in the dead woman’s face before leaving the murder scene with a jaunty whistle). The time-scale here is extremely compressed, with little room left for the development of a murder plot; the revelation of a friendship between Bill and the dark stranger comes out of nowhere (“No my dear friend, it’s the only way out for you,” the latter says when Bill asks if they’re going too far) and the need for a murder in the first place is hard to fathom. We don’t actually see the stranger shoot Lorna; we hear shots and a scream on the soundtrack; so is Bill the dupe here? Perhaps the stranger was double-crossing him. After the deed has seemingly been done and Bill returns to his Berlin apartment he finds Lorna lying naked on the sofa, demanding an embrace which leads to his death, corrida-style, with a knife pushed through the back





*Succubus*, clockwise from top left: Bill (Jack Taylor) playing 'Spillane' with Lorna ... Lorna (Janine Reynaud) as "The Queen of Dance; the Stripper!" ... 'The Admiral' (Howard Vernon) in a scene unused in the finished film ... Lorna at a friend's acid party ... Bill and his rich playboy friend Hermann (Pier A. Caminnecki, wearing glasses) at the bar - note Lorna's creator (Michel Lemoine) in the far background ... Lorna rehearses her nightclub act, with Bella (Nathalie Nort) and an unnamed male friend (Américo Coimbra).



*Anti-clockwise from top left: Lorna (Janine Reynaud) seen here during the shoot for the living mannequin sequence, although this eerie composition was not included in the film and may have been staged for the stills photographer... Lorna aka 'The Countess' wandering through Lisbon ... and visiting her 'home' (Lisbon's famous Belem Tower).*





Circa 1967 - Jess Franco with his leading lady  
Janine Reynaud, during the shooting of  
*Necronomicon* aka *Succubus*.



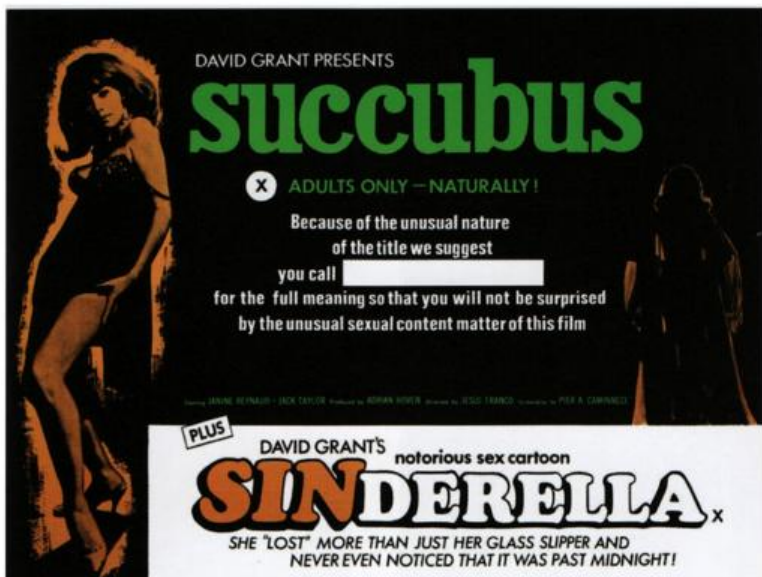
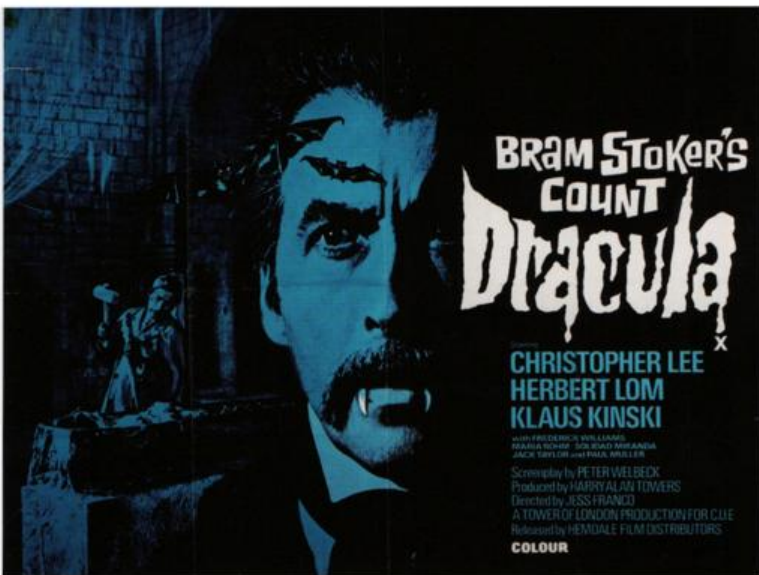
A NIGHTMARE OF TERROR IN THE MACABRE

# THE DEMON DOCTOR

SEE THE MANIAC DOCTOR  
IN THE HORROR FILM OF  
THE AGE

HE LURES LOVELY  
WOMEN FOR MONSTROUS EXPERIMENTS

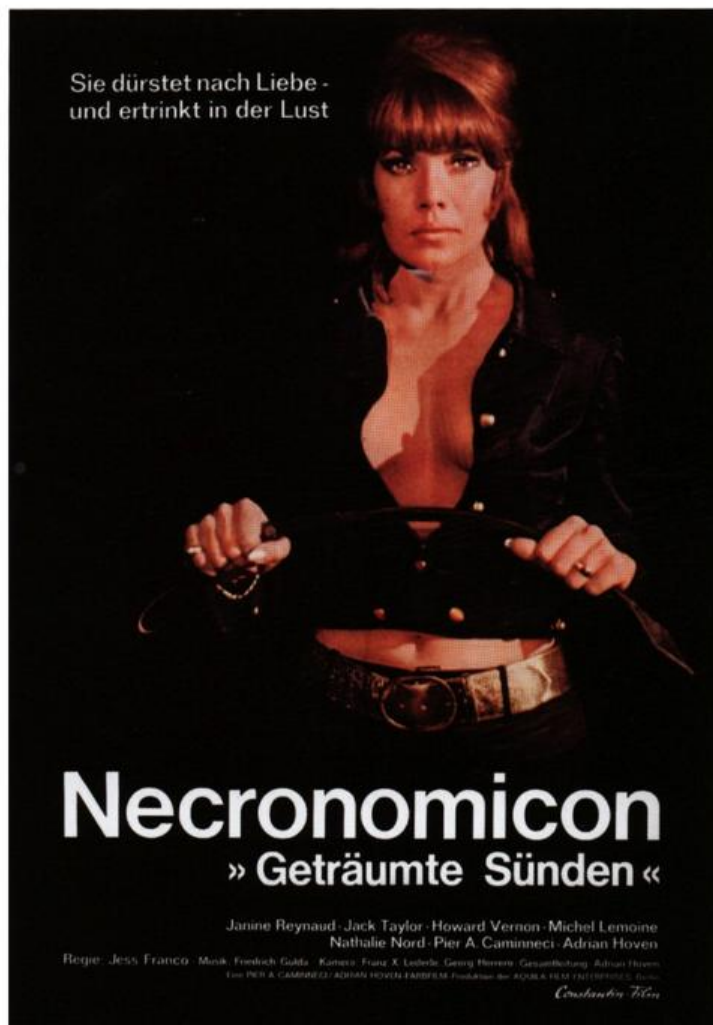




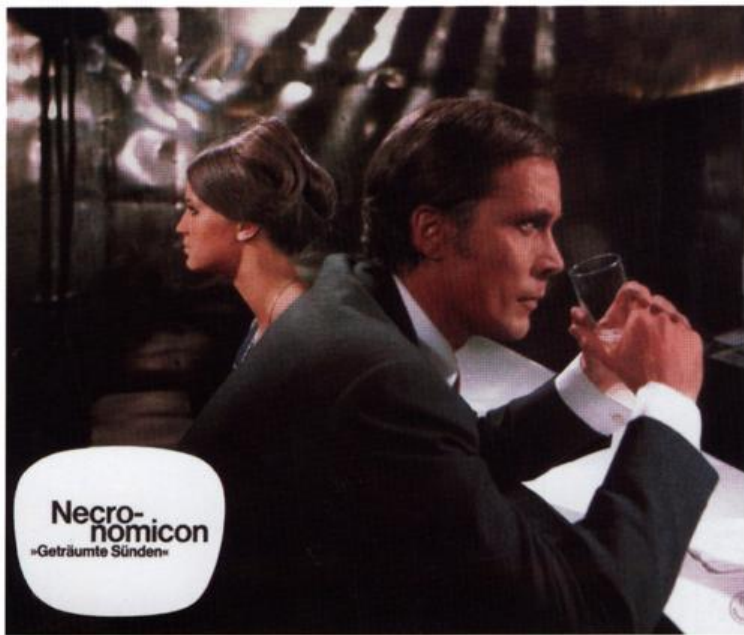
FACING PAGE: *The Awful Dr. Orlof* first saw release in the UK as *The Demon Doctor*.

THIS PAGE: Five posters for Jess Franco films released in the UK, and one (*Eugenie ...the story of her journey into perversion*) from the United States. *The Diabolical Dr. Z* was double-billed with Dino Tavella's Italian murder mystery *The Embalmer* (1965) aka *Il mostro di Venezia*. *Succubus* was accompanied by a short animation directed by controversial Brit-porn distributor David Hamilton Grant.









#### *Necronomicon aka Succubus*

##### FACING PAGE

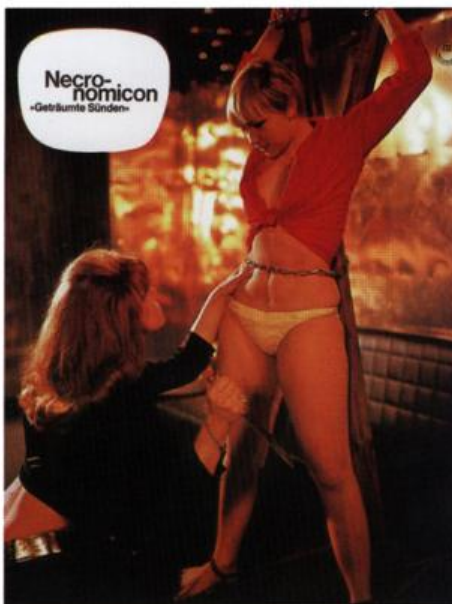
Centre pictures: German release poster (the subtitle "Getraumte Sünden", does not appear onscreen) ... Michel Lemoine as Lorna's sinister 'creator'.

Left column: Janine Reynaud as Lorna, dress by Karl Lagerfeld ... Jack Taylor as Lorna's lover and manager Bill Mulligan ... Michel Lemoine as 'Pierce', who claims to have 'created' Lorna (this shot not included in the film) ... Adrian Hoven as Dawes, Lorna's psychiatrist ... Bill and Lorna get into a fight.

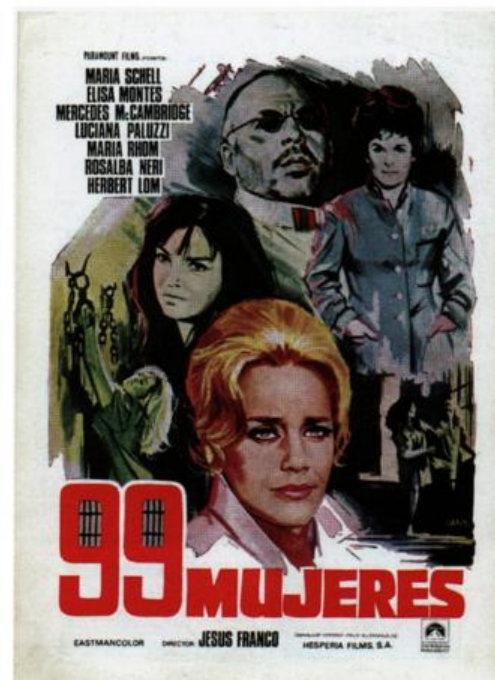
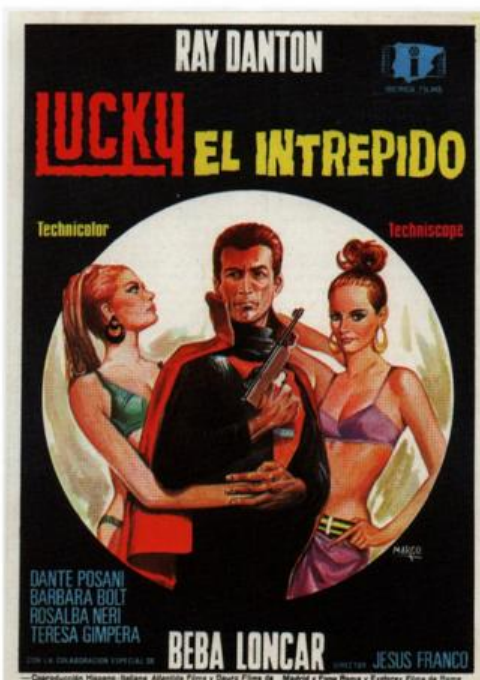
Right side column: Bill and Lorna in party mood ... Dawes keeps his cool as an amorous transvestite makes a pass ... Jack and Lorna try to connect during a trip to the country (this shot not included in the film) ... The first appearance in a Franco film of the 'corrida' method of killing with a knife to the back of the neck ... Bill realises his schemes have failed...

##### THIS PAGE

Americo Coimbra and Nathalie Nort as 'make-believe' victims in Lorna's stage show ... Lorna dances with 'The Admiral' (Howard Vernon) ... before murdering him with a hat-pin ... A jaded Bill discusses art and cinema with a gnomish female acquaintance ... Lorna subjects her fellow actors to a heavy dose of ontological dread...





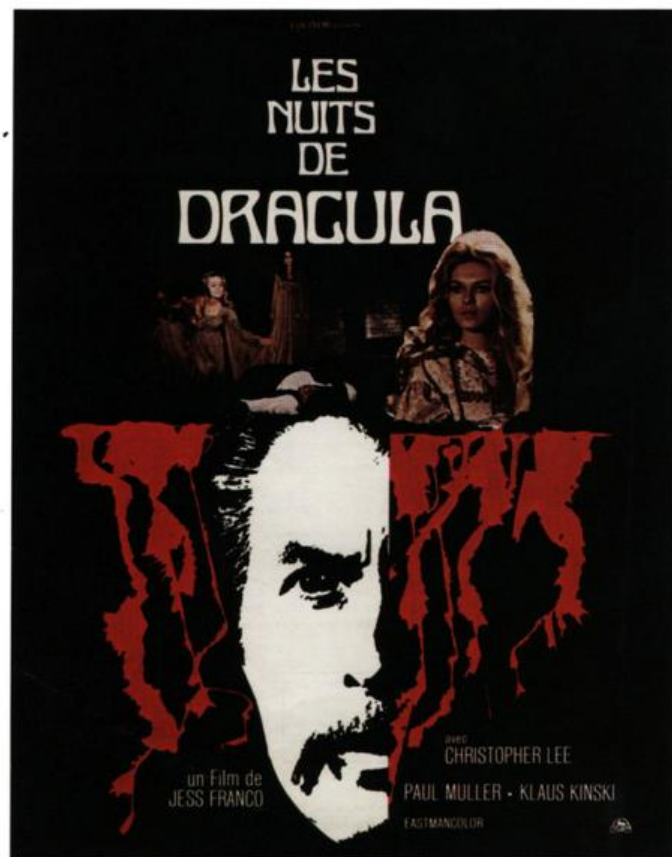


Above: Spanish posters for *Attack of the Robots*, *Lucky the Inscrutable* and *99 Women*.

Below: Janine Reynaud and Rossana Yanni as Diana and Regina, aka 'The Red Lips' in *Sadisterotica*

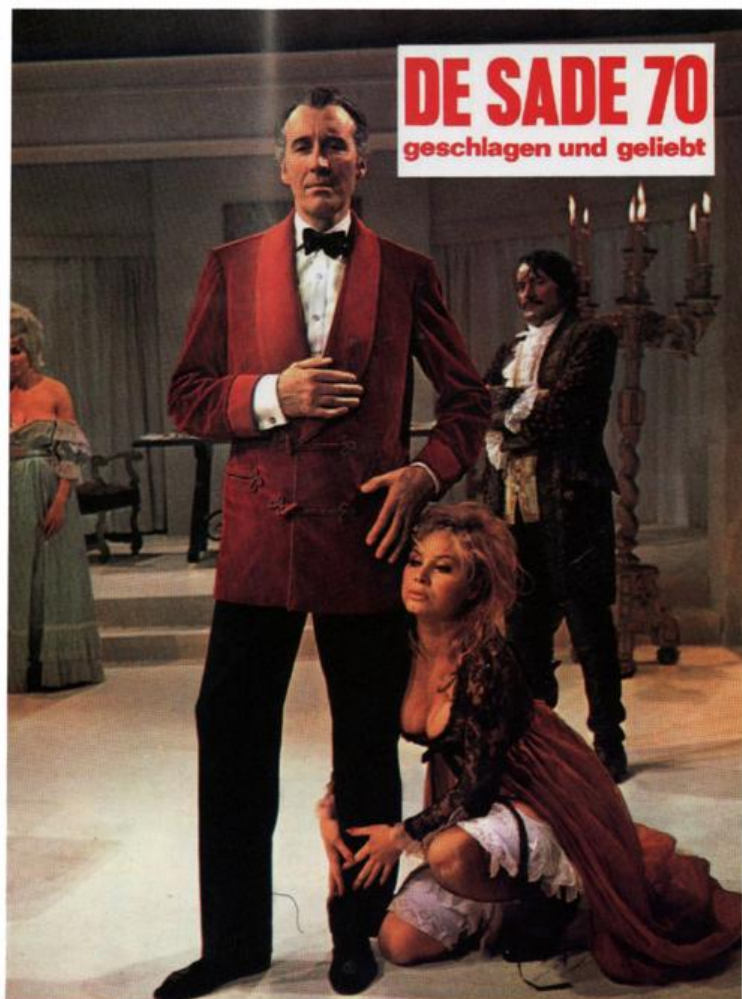






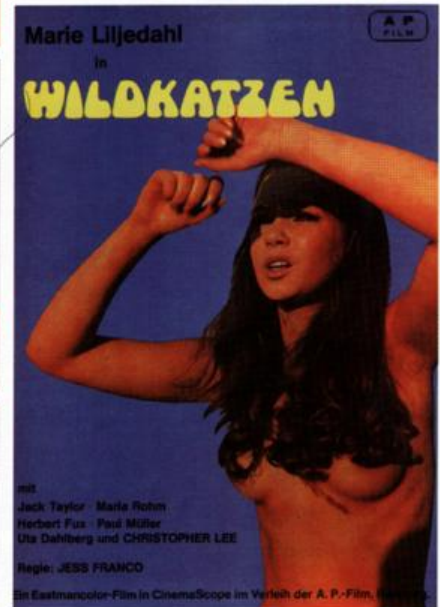
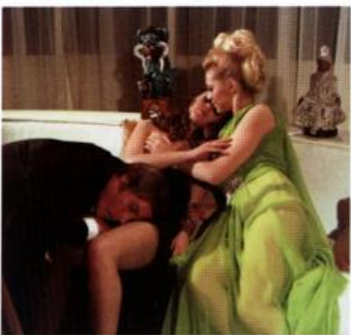
Left: Diana meets Klaus Tiller (Adrian Hoven) in *Sadisterotica*. Above: the star power of Christopher Lee: German and French posters for *Count Dracula*, and a German ad-sheet for *The Castle of Fu Manchu*.





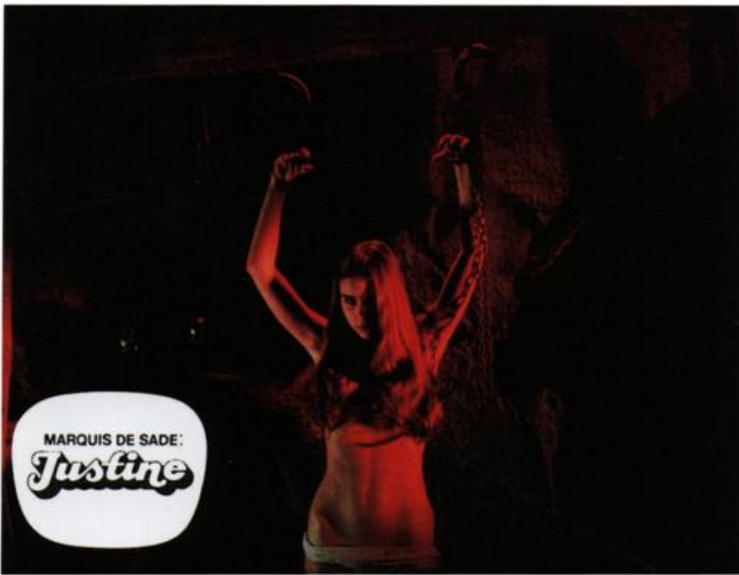
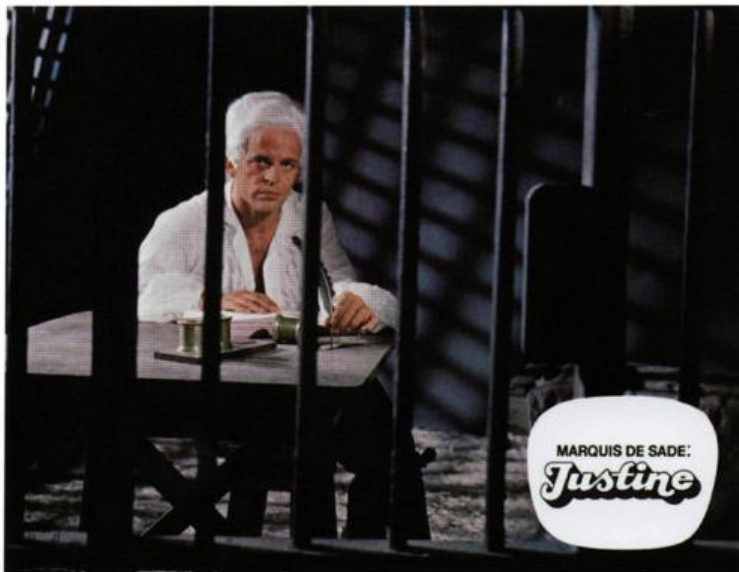
*Eugenie...* the story of her journey into perversion took a while to secure release, being denied an official British airing and requiring three attempts in West Germany. The stills above were produced in anticipation of these thwarted releases, firstly as *De Sade 70* and then as *Die Jungfrau und die Peitsche* (you can see the old title through the sticker). Clockwise from top left: Christopher Lee as arch Sadean Dolmance; Maria Rohm as Marianne St. Ange; Paul Muller as Eugenie's masochistic father; Jack Taylor as Mirvel, Marianne's violent 'stepbrother'.





*Eugenie... the story of her journey into perversion cont'd.* Left column: Maria Rohm, wife of producer Harry Alan Towers and star of many Towers productions, showing off her assets. Centre column: Marianne and Mirvel stage black mass murders (presided over by Herbert Fux, holding whip and wearing bishop's hat) to terrorise innocent young Eugenie. Right column: Jack Taylor and Maria Rohm, like brother and sister... Poster for the film's third (successful) attempt at a German release, as *Wildkatzen* ... Eugenie (Marie Liljedahl) is embroiled in murder by Mirvel (Taylor).





Above: Klaus Kinski as the imprisoned Marquis De Sade, and Romina Power as his fantasy whipping girl Justine, in the Franco-Towers adaptation *Justine*.

*The Girl from Rio*: Yana (Beni Cardoso) and friend gloat over a fallen male ... Jeff (Richard Wyler) and Ulla (Marta Reves) escape ... Yana takes instruction from Sumanda (Shirley Eaton).

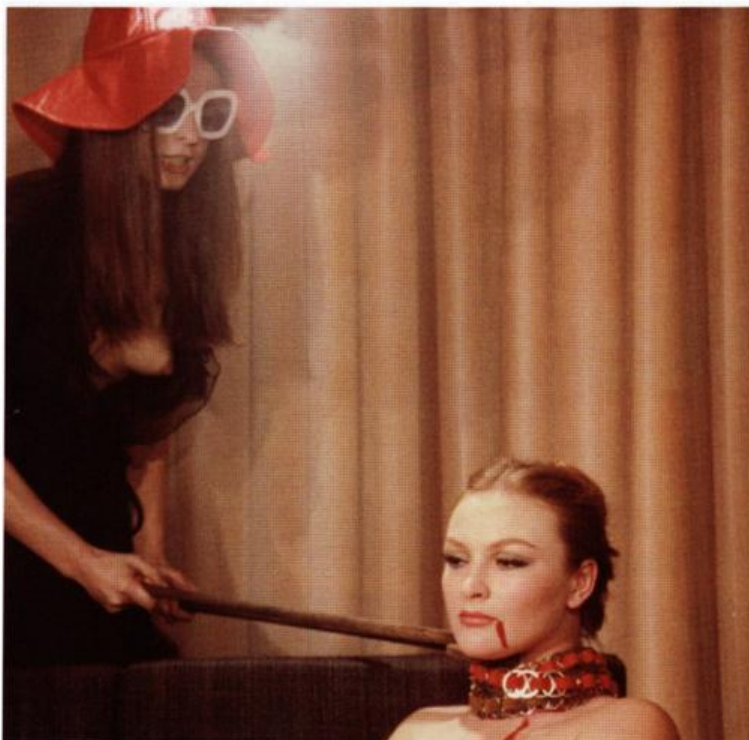




Top row, from *The Bloody Judge*: Harry (Hans Hass) comforts Mary (Maria Rohm) ... Executioner and torturer Jack Ketch (Howard Vernon) gets to work on Alicia Gray (Margaret Lee).

Middle and bottom row: scenes from *The Castle of Fu Manchu* starring Christopher Lee and Tsai Lin as the villain's daughter Lin Tang. Gunther Stoll and Maria Perschy look on, above.

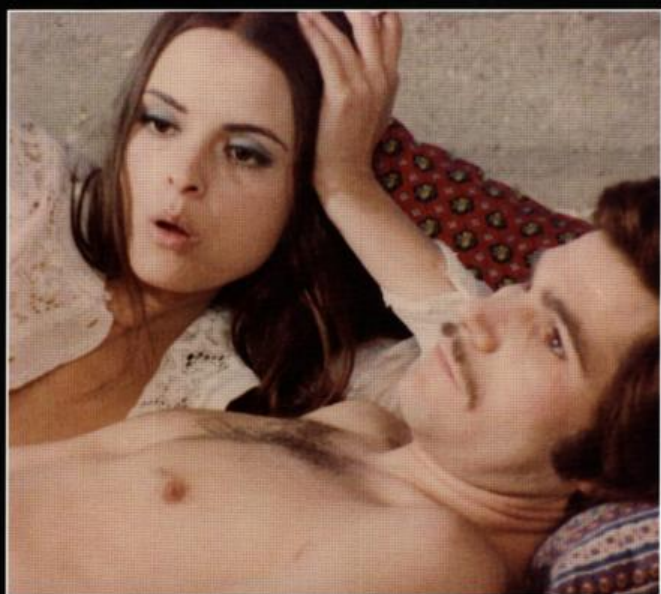




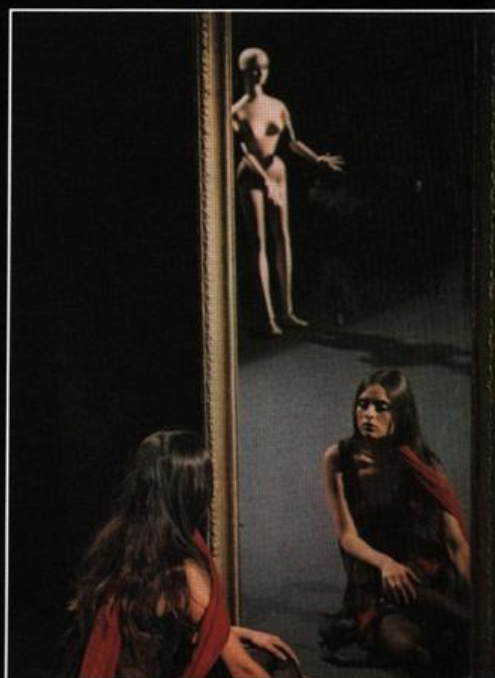
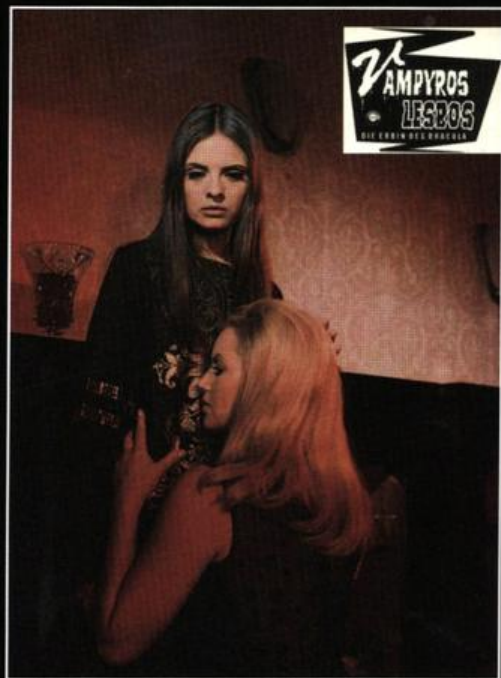
*Eugenie* aka *Eugenie De Sade*: clockwise from top left. Incestuous lovers Eugenie (Soledad Miranda) and her father Albert Radeck (Paul Muller) embark on a murder spree, involving way-out disguises and the slaying of a model (Alice Arno, in her first of many roles for Franco).

FACING PAGE: More scenes from *Eugenie*, with Andres Monales as Paul, Eugenie's lover, a musician with whom she strives for a different kind of love. Bottom left: Poster artwork from the Italian and Franco-Belgian releases.













# SIE TÖTETE IN EKSTASE



SIE  
TÖTETE  
IN EKSTASE



SIE  
TÖTETE  
IN EKSTASE



## FACING PAGE - *Vampyros Lesbos*

Featuring Soledad Miranda in her most iconic role as the Countess Carody, a lesbian vampire nightclub entertainer working in Istanbul, seen here with Ewa Stromberg as Linda, a married estate agent with lesbian 'stirrings' who falls under her erotic spell.

## THIS PAGE - *She Killed in Ecstasy*

Above: Dr. Donen (Jess Franco) at the vengeful mercy of the wife of Dr. Johnson, a colleague whom he destroyed by belittling his work and hounding him from the profession. Soledad Miranda plays the avenging Mrs. Johnson, seen (far left) with Ewa Stromberg as the doomed Dr. Crawford and (near left) with Fred Williams as her troubled husband.







of his neck. The film ends with the stranger driving Lorna back to the castle in Lisbon, exhorting her to sleep and forget about what has happened. It seems he has won; he has mastered Lorna, eradicated Bill, and taken his prize to a place of isolation beyond the reach of others. Yet we know nothing about him, about his motives, his methods, his identity. Is he a supernatural figure? A mesmerist? A lover from Lorna's past? And why did he need her to kill the nightclub performers if all he wanted was Bill out of the picture? The film ends in such a way that we must waive any claim to a coherent answer.

Those who would like Franco to be celebrated outside of the sleaze circuit often pin their hopes on *Succubus*, in the expectation that its obvious cultural awareness will speak to admirers of 'art cinema'. To me, however, *Succubus* is best regarded in context of its time, when erotica learned to sneak past the censor by 'dragging up' as high art. The greatest commercial strength of the 'art film' was its tendency to explore sexuality more frankly than mainstream movies; the view of a significant number of cinema patrons can be summarised as, 'I can cope with alienation technique as long as the girls get their tits out'. Many who trawled art-houses in the 1960s were simply looking for a sex kick they could pass off as 'thoughtful' or 'challenging' or 'radical' rather than simply 'hot' or 'kinky', and I'm sure that Jess Franco was very well aware of it when he wrote this film. So maybe it's time to put this matter to bed, so to speak. The film is witty and beautiful, but not 'meaningful'. It's culturally aware, but not culturally engaged. It's chock-full of references, but it uses them as bluffs and distractions, like the fluttering fans of deceitful ladies-at-court. Each reference is part homage, part piss-take; Franco shows his cultural erudition, but the signposts are at best parodic, at worst merely gestures in a void...

Yet although *Succubus* can be coy and irritating, it is, by and large, a beautiful and imaginative work which demonstrates its creator's erotic daring, his sophistication and his sardonic sense of humour. Is it art, or a parody of art cinema, or a mixture made to a recipe Franco knocked up on the spot? Some scenes indulge beauty for its own sake; the fish-tank scene for instance, with its subtle flicker of light on water, the flitting of fish as they dart to and fro with vague lovemaking figures glimpsed in the background, the tendrils of music curling like elegant seaweed, the deep rich colours lubricating the eye. All 'very 1960s' of course, but an expression of abstract visual charm, a gesture neither too much nor too little. Other moments are a tad embarrassing; the psychiatrist reading aloud from a book at the acid party, for instance, who is not only a jerk, detached from the frolics of the others, but is also given a bunch of twittish lines (including some badly mangled Goethe) by the script. Whatever kind of idiot he's meant to be, he ends up fused with bad scripting into the bargain. It's a shame, because it's hard to gauge the status of a parody when the dialogue has been mistranslated (for what it's worth, the original German version conveys the Goethe quotations more

accurately). Meanwhile the Admiral's game, with its repeated use of literary figures as 'triggers' for Lorna's responses, can seem like nothing more than highbrow showing off. Asking someone to respond spontaneously to names like "Heine" or "Capote" or "François Villon" turns word-association, supposedly a way to tease out the intricacies of the unconscious mind, into a kind of intellectual pissing contest; when Lorna removes a shoe as forfeit for failing to come up with a response it seems the failure is simply not having the requisite knowledge to make an association. Nevertheless, I'm inclined to give *Succubus* the benefit of the doubt: if Franco seems occasionally to stuff actors' mouths with cod-poetic musings instead of dialogue, there are numerous instances where it's most likely meant as a parody of that same tendency in art cinema generally, an idea given weight by remarks Franco has made about despising the sort of cinema propounded by Eric Rohmer, which he once scoffingly described as, "*couples making love while discussing Johnsonism*."<sup>2</sup> And when the word-association game includes "the unconscious" as one of its references, there is at least a genuine wit to the enterprise; to ask with what you associate the unconscious is an absurdist joke at the expense of psychiatry that mitigates the pretentiousness elsewhere.

The glorious music, the pictorial elegance, the dreamy dislocation, the sense of majesty and portent, these are the gorgeous and mesmerising hallmarks of *Succubus*. However they are chiefly sense impressions, created by Franco's skilled manipulation of mood and his careful sculpting of our awareness of time and place. Ellipses in the narrative require that we surrender logic in favour of emotional and atmospheric pleasures. Franco was a sensualist, not an intellectual. He has nothing of weight and complexity to say about 'alienation', 'modern life', social change, the eruption of simulacra into reality, or the marginalisation of non-capitalistic models: political changes in his native country are glancingly addressed only inasmuch as they affect sexual freedom. Franco is way too hedonistic for the post-war intellectual's shopping list of 'issues' and 'engagements'. There are no manifestos here, no secret codes, and no 'hidden meanings'. Franco is on the surface. It's a surface of great beauty, seductive and strange and voluptuous, and something that we ought intimately to value, if we weren't so busy trying to dig beneath it. For Franco, what matters is the experience of life, the marvel of the moment; the only mystery of *Succubus* is that we search so assiduously for depth when the answer is right there under our noses: namely the texture and sensuality of which the film is so immaculately constructed.

**Cast and crew:** Janine Reynaud as Lorna makes an astonishing impression, and as she's onscreen most of the time she's an indispensable asset to the production. With strong cheekbones, intense eyes, make-up like a drag queen's fever-dream and a deep sonorous voice that rivals such female tenors as Nico, Grace Jones and Amanda Lear, Reynaud is really quite a find.





She was the wife of actor-turned-director Michel Lemoine, who plays her supernatural Svengali in the film. Reynaud went on to a variety of roles, some of them notable, including a blackmailer-turned-victim in Sergio Martino's exemplary giallo *The Case of the Scorpion's Tail* (1971), and a starring role (alongside Lemoine again) in José Bénazéraf's extraordinary psychodrama *Frustration* (1972) ... Jack Taylor, whom Marius Lesoeur introduced to Franco shortly before the filming of *Succubus*, was born George Brown Randall on October 21, 1936. He got his start acting in the early 1950s, appearing on *The Jack Benny Show* with Marilyn Monroe. After a smattering of TV roles on shows like *Sheena, Queen of the Jungle* and *Adventures of Captain Grief* he spent some time in Mexico, appearing in horror and action-adventure films for Frederico Curiel and Alphonso Corona Blake. Moving to Spain in 1963 he acted in just three films – Amando de Ossorio's *Tomb of the Pistolero* (1964), León Klimovsky's *Fuera de la ley* (1964) and Mateo Caño's *Fall of the Mohicans* (1964) – before hooking up with Franco. He would go on to appear in a further nine Franco films between 1967 and 1977 ... Dante Posani, handsome co-star of *Lucky the Inscrutable*, can be seen at the beginning of the film at a nightclub table, watching Lorna's show ... Pier Caminneci receives screen billing as writer of the story and screenplay, a credit Franco disputed, saying that it was simply added to meet legal requirements for German co-productions; apparently Franz Lederle was credited as cinematographer for the same reason ... Caminneci tried to persuade Franco to make a follow-up, but Franco refused. Camminecci went ahead and made it himself, as *Wie kurz ist die Zeit zu lieben* (aka 'How Short Is the Time for Love'). It reunited Reynaud, Michel Lemoine and Caminneci himself, with a score once again by Jerry Von Rooyen. ... American version director Terry Van Tell (credited here as 'Terry Vantell') is also known as Terry Curtis, and is the wife of dubbing director/actor Jack Curtis (producer of 1962's *The Flesh Eaters*). The pair formed US dubbing company Film-Synch, Inc. in 1955 and created English-language versions of such films as *Wages of Fear* (1953), *Rififi* (1955), and two films by Luigi Scattini: *War Italian Style* (1965) and *The Glass Sphinx* (1967).

**Music:** In a film where it's impossible to draw lines between opposites (reality and illusion; good and evil; sense and nonsense) it's fitting that the score, by Jerry van Rooyen, based on the work of Friedrich Gulda, should be a blend of two quite different traditions. Is it jazz, or classical? The themes keep bouncing back and forth between the two. Fragments of Liszt can be heard among jazz extemporisations that are part be-bop, part coolest Miles (especially the classical-latin-jazz fusion album *Sketches of Spain*, a personal favourite of Franco's). Meanwhile, the music that accompanies Lorna's stage show returns to the atonal piano scrapings of Franco's music for *The Awful Dr. Orlof*.

**Locations:** Shot in Lisbon and Berlin, the film makes fantastic use of the Torre de Belém, a fortified tower on the Lisbon coast at the Northern mouth of the Tagus River, commissioned by

King João II as part of the city's defences; it was also intended to mark a ceremonial gateway to Lisbon for visitors arriving by sea. Completed in 1519 and used as a fort, with cannons on the battlements, it went through numerous changes of usage until 1956 when architectural landscaper António Viana Barreto integrated the Tower with the local shoreline and created the accessible location used by Franco. It is classified by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site ... The most prominent Berlin location is a pedestrian footbridge (now defunct) by the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church; the church can be seen in the background as Bill and the dark stranger discuss killing Lorna. As he wistfully remembers Lorna, Bill drives past the famous Reichstag building and the oyster-shaped Haus der Kulturen der Welt ('House of the Cultures of the World'). During the bar-room scene between Lorna and the Admiral, signs appear to indicate an Italian location; the word "Aperitivo" and another word ending "...bissimo" can be seen. Were scenes for *Necronomicon* shot in Rome? This is not impossible; the previous Franco film was *Lucky the Inscrutable*, a Spanish-Italian-West German co-production made partly in Rome, and the audience for Lorna's stage show includes an uncredited non-speaking appearance by Lucky's Italian co-star Dante Posani; either some of the film was shot in Rome studios, or perhaps Franco grabbed a few scenes for this film while making *Lucky*?

**UK theatrical release:** As *Succubus*, the film had a rocky passage through the UK censor board and was finally granted an 'X' certificate on the 24 September 1973. (See Appendix "Franco at the BBFC".) Cuts were made and the film opened in various London sex cinemas in December 1973.

**Connections:** In a sense, *Succubus* is all about connections. Franco purloined the German-language title *Necronomicon* from the works of Rhode Island scholar, poet, essayist, novelist and doyen of cosmic horror, H.P. Lovecraft (1890–1937). Lovecraft's fictional 'Necronomicon', a grimoire of gods, spells and monsters referred to by numerous characters in his fiction, is an imaginary book sometimes taken for a real one, that was first referred to in the short story *The Hound*, published in 1924. Subsequently it turned up as a touchstone of occult knowledge in several of the author's later stories, including the novellas *At the Mountains of Madness* and *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*. Lovecraft named the Arabian author of this book 'Abdul Alhazred' and asserted that copies existed for real in a number of museum libraries around the world. Such was the allure of this fictional construct that readers sometimes believed Lovecraft's claims that the book and its insane Arabian author were real. However, there is no occult grimoire to be seen in Franco's *Necronomicon*, nor is one referred to in the script. No omniscient narrator conveys the action as if it were some forbidden text, magickal lore plays no part in the story, and there are no Arabs screaming curses to ward off daemonic other-dimensional monstrosities. Essentially, Franco just loved the word, although he did claim that he based

the story on a genuine grimoire called 'The Necronomicon' discovered in fragmentary form and kept by the University of Vienna! Some observers may put this down to Franco's taste for teasing reviewers, or his dedication to blurring the line between fact and fiction. If it's the latter, it's entirely in keeping with the theme of the film, which is precisely the permeable membrane between reality and fantasy. Given the importance of dreams in Franco, the following quote from occultist Donald Tyson is also interesting: "It seems to me that at some time in the past I read a third version of the Necronomicon, but I cannot locate this book in my library and cannot remember how I may have come across it. Most likely I read it in a dream, which is not too unusual an occurrence for me ... By all means, purchase, read, study, memorize and take to heart any and all of the books sold in the stores with the title Necronomicon, but for heaven's sake remember as you do so that they are phonies, each and every one. The only genuine Necronomicon is the one you will read in your own dreams, as I did, and as Lovecraft did."<sup>3</sup> ... The opening credits appear over close-ups of various paintings, shown only in small details; among the pictures featured are Hieronymus Bosch's *The Last Judgement* (one of three Bosch triptychs with this same name; the version used here exists only as a fragment and resides at the Alte Pinakothek in Munich) ... *Necronomicon* is a continuation of the mind-control theme elaborated in *The Diabolical Dr. Z*, with the sinister yet vulnerable Lorna in the "Miss Death" role, and Michel Lemoine in the Irma Zimmer role ... Other filmmakers are invoked in a conversation between Bill and a cynical young woman while he auditions an atrocious avant-garde performance 'artiste'. Deciding that the act they're watching is "outmoded", the two trade comments on Stockhausen ("he's bad"), Pop-Art ("very, very bad!") and the Rolling Stones ("not bad... antiquated") before Bill dryly remarks: "Films are outmoded, don't you agree? They're shown three months after they're made." The woman responds: "Buñuel, Fritz Lang, Godard - they're not outmoded. Every time I see their films they seem new to me... they've got something." The whole exchange begins as though intended simply to be amusing, but the comments about Lang, Buñuel and Godard seem serious and heartfelt. See 'Other Versions' for more on this dialogue.

**Other versions:** Variations between the German cut (*Necronomicon*, supervised by Franco) and the American cut (*Succubus*, supervised by Terry Van Tell for Titan Productions Inc., New York) are numerous. Here then is a list of eighteen notable differences: 1). A slow zoom into Pierce's face during Lorna's opening nightclub act remains silent and enigmatic in *Necronomicon*, whereas *Succubus* adds a voice-over ("I have done well. She is perfect. A disciple who mirrors my own image. The essence of Evil; a Devil on Earth"). 2). In *Necronomicon*, at Bill's apartment after the show, Lorna picks up a furniture inventory addressed to him as "Sir William Francis Mulligan"; he's just plain "Bill" in *Succubus*. 3). In *Necronomicon*, Lorna humorously scat-sings the furniture inventory to a jazz number spinning on the record player; she doesn't sing at all in *Succubus*. 4). When Lorna

tries to interest Bill in her strip-tease, his response is softer in *Necronomicon* ("Way too old-fashioned, my child!") than in *Succubus* ("Old-fashioned and boring"). 5). In *Necronomicon*, during Lorna's first psychiatric consultation with Drawes, Franco cuts away to show her asleep with Bill. In both versions the consultation ends with Lorna sitting up in bed, hinting that the meeting was a dream; the German cut makes this clearer. 6). In *Necronomicon*, after rising from bed and going for a walk, Lorna muses, "I have to hurry. Poor old Princess Liselotte Palatine would never forgive me." This is an arcane reference to a genuine historical figure, namely Princess Palatine Elizabeth Charlotte "Liselotte" (1652-1722), German wife of Philippe I, Duke of Orléans. In *Succubus* the name is changed to 'Princess Borodin' (a Russian surname that does not appear to coincide with any real-life royal figure). 7). In *Necronomicon*, as Lorna travels through Lisbon on a trolley-bus, she seems to believe she's in San Francisco, and muses that it looks a lot like Lisbon; in *Succubus* she remarks that the trolley-bus reminds her of San Francisco. 8). In *Necronomicon*, when the chauffeur-driven car takes Lorna to the castle, her voice-over refers to "Hermine" being "caressed by the waves of the Caribbean" (an obscure reference I can't decipher); in *Succubus* she muses on the more familiar subject of Pandora's box. 9). The scene in which Lorna plays the word association game with 'The Admiral' varies considerably, beginning with the Admiral's opening question (in *Necronomicon* it's "Did you bring the pebbles?"; in *Succubus* it's "Did you bring the Symbols?"). The game in *Necronomicon* unfolds thus: "Rattigan - eucalyptus; Godard - lemon; Nitribitt - spermatozoid; Faulkner - bull; Henry Miller - sweet birds; Robbe-Grillet - [no answer]; Charlie Mingus - anger; Story of O - Georges Bataille; Justine - love; love - flesh; past - Marquis de Sade; religion - Gomorrah... flesh... Sade... Gomorrah; François Villon - butterfly; Strauss - bat; Peter Weiss - circle; Kafka - castle gate; Heine - passion; Hitchcock - eyes; Caldwell - murder." The game in *Succubus* proceeds as follows: "Faulkner - cold; Henry Miller - birds in winter; Capote - [no answer]; Charlie Mingus - anger; The Story of O - whips; Justine - love; love - body; Camus - plague; tomorrow - The Inferno; the unconscious - Marquis de Sade; religion - Gomorrah ... Goethe ... Sade ... Gomorrah; François Villon - bitterness; Johann Strauss - bats; Peter Weiss - circle; Kafka - castle; Heine - domino; Hitchcock - eyes; Caldwell - murder." Among the more obscure references, Rosemarie Nitribitt was a high class call-girl murdered in 1957, whose life story was made into two films, *Das Mädchen Rosemarie* (1958) and *Die Wahrheit über Rosemarie* (1959), while François Villon was a 15th century French poet, writer of *Le Testament*, a thief, housebreaker and violent scoundrel whose poetry drew on the argot of the criminal classes, and which often employed deliberate obfuscations and private jokes, peppered with slang and the names of real people - rich men, court officials, prostitutes, policemen; one wonders whether Villon's working methods influenced Franco, especially with regard to the use of real names and private jokes! The 'Heine' Lorna mentions could be Christian





Top row: Lorna takes her revenge on Bill ... Lorna, photographed here using the hazy filter that characterises the Lisbon-shot scenes in the film.  
 Bottom row: On location in Lisbon, Franco offers guidance to Janine Reynaud ... Lorna at her palatial home, with mystery pianist (sometimes erroneously credited as Daniel White).



*Top row: Lorna; narcissist and seductress ... Howard Vernon, in a moodily lit test shot for the eye-piercing make-up.  
Bottom row: Lorna's stage show enacts a mysterious fragment from an S&M love triangle.*



Johann Heinrich Heine, the German poet, journalist, essayist, and literary critic, and is it *Erskine Caldwell*, author of *Tobacco Road* and *God's Little Acre*, whose name connotes murder? As they say, discuss! 10). During the party sequence, *Necronomicon* includes a twenty second shot of a transvestite talking nonsense during her acid trip; this is snipped from *Succubus*. 11). At the same party, Drawes reads aloud from a book while the others take LSD; in *Necronomicon* his words are direct quotations from the Walpurgisnacht segment of Goethe's *Faust, eine Tragödie* (in which Mephisto seeks to distract Faust from his cares by taking him to a witches' sabbath - a critique of drugs as 'escapism' from Franco?)<sup>4</sup>; in *Succubus* he spouts a tangle of mistranslated Goethe and oddball nonsense. 12). *Succubus* adds a shot of a magazine centrespread perused by a female acid-popper, and a single short cutaway of Drawes pontificating. 13). As Lorna and Bill leave the party they are accosted by Drawes: in *Necronomicon* he says, "Good evening Countess. That was an insightful party. You'll get your diagnosis tomorrow", to which Lorna replies, "What do you want? Leave me be." In *Succubus* he says, "Your behaviour struck me as being strange - very strange", to which Lorna says, "Who are you? I don't remember you." ... 14). When Lorna returns to Bill's apartment after the death of Eva, *Necronomicon* includes a ten second shot, not present in *Succubus*, of her sitting alone clutching a doll. 15). Bill watches a terrible nightclub auditioner who in *Succubus* declaims nonsense like "My feathers are the child in man" and in *Necronomicon* quotes Rainer Maria Rilke's prose poem *The Lay of the Love and Death of Cornet Christoph Rilke*. 16). Bill and a young woman discuss art, and the woman reels off a list of things she regards as out-moded. In *Necronomicon* these include Karlheinz Stockhausen (the electronic music pioneer), Calder (maybe Alexander Calder, the American sculptor who originated the 'mobile', an example of which can be seen during the acid-party sequence?), Pop Art and The Rolling Stones. Not outmoded in *Necronomicon* are: Palestrina (probably Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina, the Renaissance composer), Goethe (fittingly, given the copious quotations earlier), Ahmad Jamal (the American jazz pianist), The Four Tops (American vocal quartet), Julio Cortázar (the Argentinian novelist and poet whose work inspired Antonioni's *Blowup* and Godard's *Weekend*), and Holbein (although which of the four related painters named Holbein she's referring to is left unclear). 17). Both *Necronomicon* and *Succubus* specify the same Holy Trinity of filmmakers whose work is deemed immune to the ravages of irony, fashion and cynicism: Lang, Godard, Buñuel. *Necronomicon* amplifies the point by adding, "Yesterday they made movies for tomorrow, and every day we understand them better." ... 18). In *Succubus*, after Lorna kills Bill, there's a twenty second shot filmed from a car approaching the Belem Tower which does not appear in *Necronomicon*. Also unique to *Succubus* is the voice-over at the end ("She loved the games men played with death, when death must win. As though the slain man's blood and breath revived Faustine. For you, Lorna, are Faustine.").

This just leaves us with the Italian cut, *Delirium*, to examine. Only recently unearthed, thanks to a fortuitous TV screening, it puts to rest one of the great Franco mysteries; the provenance of the image of Lorna with a deathly skull-face, which appears in the Italian photo-novel (reproduced in the book *Obsession*). Long presumed to be either a lost out-take, or perhaps something created specially for the photo-novel, it turns up at last here. Instead of ending with Lorna entering the seafront castle, as she does in *Succubus* and *Necronomicon*, *Delirium* ends with her driving to the sea, standing on a cliff, turning to camera to reveal her face as a hideous (and very effective) death-mask, then throwing herself onto the rocks below. The other striking difference is a frankly bizarre sequence at the start, which prefaces Lorna's nightclub act with shots of babies wriggling on a swathe of black cloth, as if floating in space; these shots are intercut with images of dolls, one with a pin stuck in its eye. Other than these fascinating additions, *Delirium* contributes nothing new, save for a closing quote from Balzac and a tendency to scramble the sequence order of *Succubus*, turning an already confusing narrative completely haywire.

**Problematica:** The IMDb currently lists the following actors, who do not in fact appear: Jesus Franco as 'writer' and Daniel White as 'piano player' (the pianist seen at The Countess's castle is not Daniel White). There are several mis-translated credits on US prints: executive producer and production manager Karl-Heinz Mannchen is mis-credited as 'art director' and unit manager Robert Gaffron as 'director of photography'.

**Press coverage:** Considering *Succubus*'s key role in Franco's reputation today, praise at the time was hardly unanimous. Vincent Canby in *The New York Times* was highly ambivalent, calling it, "a German sex fantasy that aspires to a kind of crazy, sophomoric surreal literacy ... an otherwise forgettable orgy is brightened when one lady cries out helplessly: "Oh, Dante! Oh, Beatrice!" "All films are outmoded," says another character apropos of nothing very much. "They're shown three months after they're made." "Not the films of Buñuel and Godard," says his girl friend. With all of these elegant allusions flying around, I must say that I had some trouble keeping my mind on *Succubus* itself, which never quite makes up its mind whether it wants to be a bare-breasted exploitation movie or a nice, erotic horror story about a demented lady of bizarre sexual tastes. It winds up being a bit of a drag, staged in what might be called drag style—lots of lushly fake dream sequences and sado-masochistic love scenes, all photographed in rich, gluey color."<sup>5</sup>

Roger Ebert, on the other hand, was boorishly unimpressed: "Succubus was a flat-out bomb. It left you stunned and reeling. There was literally nothing of worth in it. Even the girl was ugly. The color looked like it had been scraped off the bottom of an old garbage boat. The acting resembled a catatonic state. The script (ha!) had the flair of a baggage tag. It was possibly the worst movie of all time. So no wonder it's in its fifth week in neighborhood theaters, after rolling up record grosses in its first run. No matter what the censor board thinks, the Chicago proletariat knows what it likes."<sup>6</sup>





# SADISTEROTICA

Spain & West Germany 1967

Spanish depósito legal number: M-2624-1968

*Original theatrical title in country of origin*

**El caso de las dos bellezas** (SP) *The Case of the Two Beauties*

**Rote Lippen Sadisterotica** (GER) *Red Lips Sadisterotica*

*Alternative titles*

**Sadist Erotica** (US theatrical poster)

**Der Wolf** (GER video) *The Wolf*

**Rote Lippen** (GER video)

**Two Undercover Angels** (US DVD)

*Production companies*

**Films Montana S.A.** (Madrid)

**Aquila Films Enterprises** (Munich)

*Theatrical distributors*

**Rosa Films** (Barcelona)

**Alpha Film** (West Germany)

**Joseph Green Pictures** (New York)

**Atlas International** (Duisberg) [international sales]

*Timeline*

Shooting date	mid-September to October	1967
GER censor cert. 39931	14 November	1968
Barcelona	07 April	1969
Seville	03 May	1969
Madrid	18 August	1969
USA (MPAA rating)	November	1972
USA (Charleston WV)	29 March	1974

*Theatrical running time*

Spain	79m
West Germany	79m

**Cast:** **Janine Reynaud** (Diana). **Rosanna Yanni** (Regina, 'Countess Anastasia do Santos'). **Adrian Hoven** (Mr. Radeck aka Klaus Tiller, also called 'The Master'). **Ana Casares** (Radeck's assistant). **Chris Howland** (Inspector Francis Malou of Interpol). **Marcelo Arroita-Jáuregui** (Inspector Tanner). **Marta Revesz [Reves]\***. **Michel Lemoine** (Morpho, Tiller's creature). **Manuel [Manolo] Otero** (Vittorio Freda, 'the playboy'). **María Antonia Redondo** (Lida Regnier, House of Dorée model). **Vicente Roca** (Garimbaldi's assistant). **Elsa Zabala** (head of House of Dorée). **Alexander Engel** (Albert Garimbaldi, gallery owner). **Ana Puértolas**. *uncredited:* **Jess Franco** (Napoleon Bolivard, gallery attendant). **Karl-Heinz Mannchen** (critic at Galería Fellù).

**Antonio Orengo** (gallery guest). **Vicente Molina Foix** (Tanner's assistant). **Manuel Velasco** (man watching dancer at Flamingo Club/hotel-casino receptionist [*two roles*]). \*credited onscreen but not visible in any available prints.

*Credits:* directed by **Jess Franco**. story idea: **Karl-Heinz Mannchen**. screenplay & dialogue: **Jess Franco & Luis Revenga**. German adaptation: **Gerd Günter Hofmann**. directors of photography: **Jorge Herrero / Franz Hofer** [GER prints add]. editors: **Francisco García Velázquez, Maruja Soriano**. art directors: **Carlos Viudes / Graf Pilati** [GER prints add]. music: **Fernando García Morcillo / Jerry van Rooyen** [GER prints]. producers: **José López Moreno / Adrian Hoven** [GER prints]. production supervisor: **Jesús García Gargoles**. production manager: **Karl-Heinz Mannchen**. 1st assistant production: **Ramón Escribano**. 2nd assistant production: **Salvador Casado**. assistant director: **Luis Revenga**. continuity: **José Manuel Goyanes, Elfriede Schmidt**. camera operator: **Pedro Martín**. focus puller: **Eduardo Pérez Climent**. still photography: **Joachim Jung**. assistant editor: **María Elisa Valero**. assistant art director: **Vicente Criado**. set construction: **Tomás Fernández**. property master: **José Luis Bermúdez de Castro**. seamstress: **Magdalena Fernández**. make-up: **Manolita García de Ponte**. assistant make-up: **Pepita del Barco**. electrical equipment: **Abamova**. set furnishings & props: **Mateos-Luna-Mengibar / Vereinigte Werkstätten** ('United-Workshop') (Munich) [GER prints]. women's clothing/wardrobe for Janine Reynaud & Rosanna Yanni: **Modas Fans**. general wardrobe: **Peris Hermanos**. laboratories: **Fotofilm Madrid, S.A.** (Spain) & **Geyer Werke** (Germany). post-synchronisation: **Arcofón, S.A.**. *English version:* **S&L Film – Synchron GmbH** (Berlin); director of dialogue: **Charles M. Wakefield**. *uncredited:* 2nd assistant director: **Vicente Molina Foix**.

"Humor! Action! Sex! Two beautiful girls about whom you'll discover whatever you wish to know ... or most of it." - admat for Madrid release.

"Their methods were unorthodox ... but the results were explosive!" - admat for the Barcelona release.

**Synopsis:** In the latest of a string of murders, Lida, a fashion model, is abducted, molested and murdered by a hairy-faced monster-man called Morpho, while a mystery observer stands by taking photos. Radeck, a rich art dealer and Lida's lover, offers Diana and her best friend Regina - who together work as a crime-fighting duo called Red Lips - a considerable cash sum if they can solve the crime. They set to work investigating the disappearances of eight girls in similar circumstances. Diana breaks into an art gallery and steals a painting, pulling off the theft under the nose of watchman Napoleon Bolivard by pretending to be a sculpture, before knocking him out cold. After Bolivard reports the assault to the police, he's murdered by the mystery photographer, a bearded man wearing an eyepatch. The painting Diana has stolen, by an artist called Klaus Tiller, appears

to depict Lida, the most recent victim, in a posture of agony. Suspecting that the artist may have something to do with the crimes, the Red Lips duo decide to track him down. At first it's difficult; Tiller is a recluse who refuses to meet his public. Regina seduces Tiller's agent Albert Garimbaldi by posing as a fabulously rich art buyer, and manages to extract from him the fact that 'Tiller' is a pseudonym, but before Garimbaldi can reveal the artist's real name he is murdered by a blowdart. Complicating the Red Lips' investigation are Vittorio Freda, an Italian playboy who tries to get off with them, and Inspector Malou of Interpol, who suspects they know more than they're telling. And among the ragbag of suspects and bystanders not everyone is what they seem...

**Production notes:** Just a few weeks after the Berlin screening of *Necronomicon* Franco was behind the camera again, for the first time shooting two films back-to-back (an idea he'd picked up from working on Joaquín Romero Marchent's twin *Zorro* films in 1962); *El caso de las dos bellezas* and *Bésame monstruo*. A matching pair cut from the same cloth, they featured the return of the 'Red Lips' duo first seen (though played by different actresses) in *Labios rojos* (1960). Production of the first, *El caso de las dos bellezas*, was announced in the Spanish press beginning mid-September (or possibly mid-October) 1967.<sup>1</sup> Allowing for a six-week shoot at most, this means that *Bésame monstruo*, which began shooting the moment *El caso* was finished, must have started in November or December 1967. Certainly they were both completed by May of 1968: when co-star Rosanna Yanni announced to the Spanish press her intention to seek dual Spanish-Italian nationality, she declared that both films were awaiting release.<sup>2</sup> *El caso de las dos bellezas* was granted a German censor certificate on 14 November 1968 (in advance of a likely German cinema release in December), while in Spain it was delayed until 7 April 1969.

**Review:** This knockabout crime caper owes a considerable debt to the classic British TV show *The Avengers*, with surreal plot twists, eccentric minor characters and beautiful female agents whose flippant response to accumulating dead bodies sets a tone both comedic and sinister. A word of warning: one must learn not to burden the film with expectations governed by its famous English-language title *Sadisterotica*, which suggests all that is wild and extreme in Franco's cinema. I must confess that I first saw the film many years ago with fevered expectations, only to feel let down as the essentially light-hearted story unfolded. Going in with the right expectations really does make a difference...

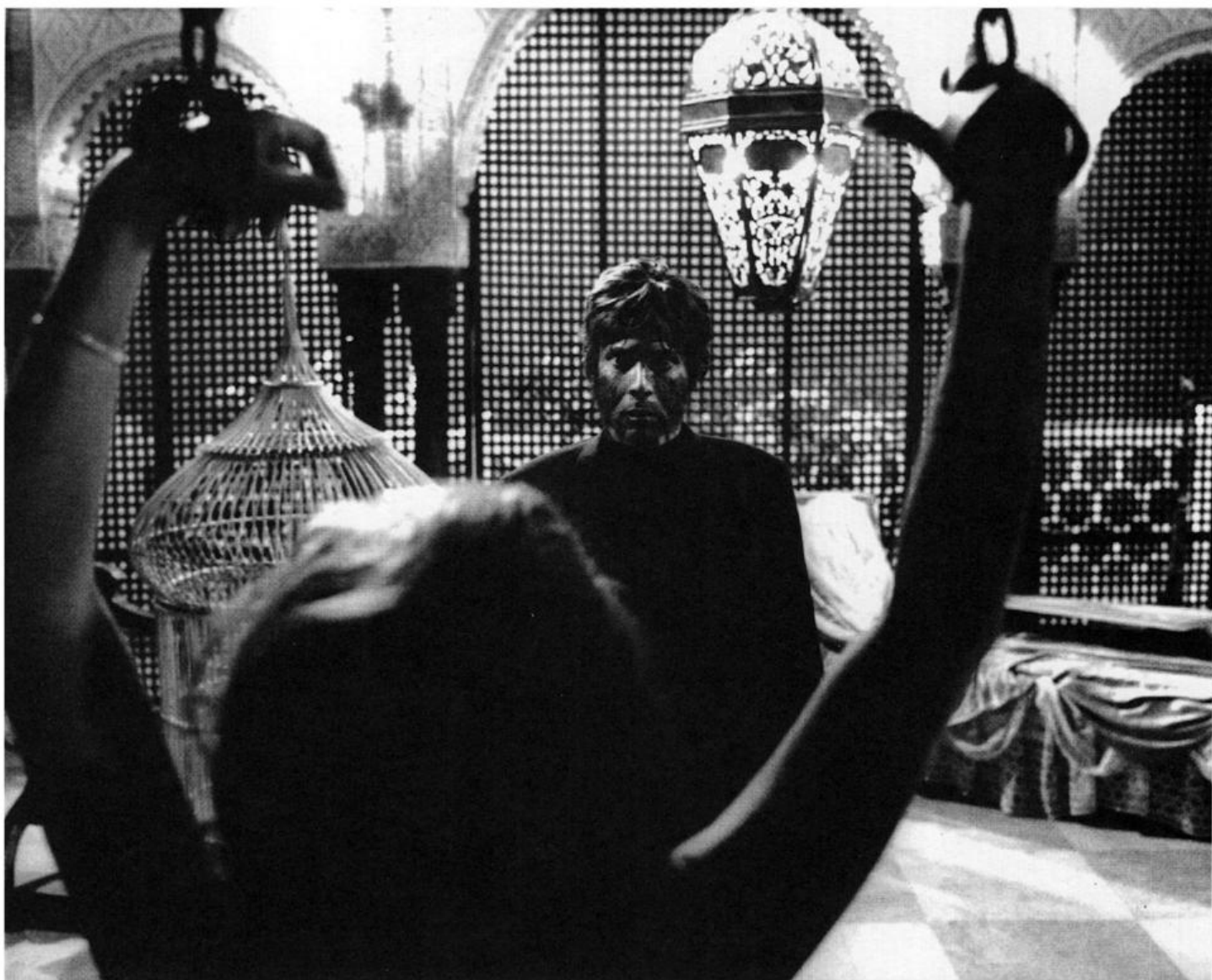
*Sadisterotica* has plenty of the antic humour that eluded Franco on his previous spy-comedy productions. It's playful and deliberately absurd, the only downside being the English dubbing, which has been carelessly performed at a German studio. The dialogue, though often genuinely funny, can't quite muster the effortless panache of the model to which it aspires because synchronisation issues and dodgy translation keep getting in the way. It can be toe-curling to hear someone stumble over the wording of a witticism,

and *Sadisterotica* puts us in that position from time to time. It's frustrating to think that with a decent script doctor and better post-sync the movie would be a near-perfect comedy confection. The story and the tone are spritely, amusing, scary, silly and sexy in just the right combination. All that's lacking is the dotting of 'i's and crossing of 't's that would seal the deal in the English translation.

Much of the humour springs from the girls and their dealings with men, and here let me reiterate my theory regarding the relative failure of *Attack of the Robots* and *Lucky the Inscrutable*. Franco cares little for his male heroes (which is why we never really feel for Ray Danton or Eddie Constantine in those movies) but give him a couple of sexy heroines and he's invigorated. There's a noticeable spring in his directorial step, because he's using his talent to celebrate female wit and ingenuity. Just like his best film to this point, *The Diabolical Dr. Z* (originally called *Miss Muerte*, let's remember), *Sadisterotica* concentrates on the guile and power of women. Reynaud plays the strong, no-nonsense alpha-female, while Yanni plays the ditz blonde who's not quite as dumb as she seems. Reynaud is the more imposing: her voice is deeper, her bone structure stronger, and she has that death-dealing quality that makes her ideal for the role of a woman who'd make mincemeat of male opposition. I've praised Reynaud extensively in the *Succubus* review, and she's fabulous here too, but let's not neglect Rosanna Yanni as Regina. The most effective comedy in the film comes when Regina pretends to be the Countess Anastasia Do Santos, a vulgar but monstrously wealthy art buyer and seductress, who'll stop at nothing to get her own way. Yanni is a comedy natural, whether plying a gallery owner agent with booze to secure a valuable artwork at half price, or persuading gallant English cop Malou to intervene on her behalf by asking "Oh my dear dear Inspector, help a defenceless woman to her rights, won't you? You're here to defend the weak! Do you have any sisters? Then you must know how women suffer..." The other party in this altercation is would-be playboy Vittorio, who snaps, "Bella signorina, you have insulted an Italian! I despise you!" before storming off in a tantrum, prompting Malou to respond "Oh, we'll survive". One suspects that this exchange was the result of Franco observing the legendary Italian temperament during the shooting of *Lucky the Inscrutable* a few months earlier!

Franco's spin on the material is far more assured than his previous spy spoofs, wittily blurring the definitions of good guys and bad. The girls may be on the side of the angels – just about – but they don't mind pouring Martini down a hapless male's throat with a funnel when they need information. "I love England! The Beatles, The Queen, and the Mail Robbers," says Regina, clarifying that these girls are amoral crusaders. There's a clever conceit too regarding the creation of art out of people's suffering, which seems, with the lightest of touches, to refer to Franco's prior success as director of shockers like *The Awful Dr. Orlof*. The victims who are terrorised by Tiller's lycanthropic monster are photographed in their fear and agony, not unlike the victims in Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* (although without the additional sadism of a mirror to reveal





Top: Michel Lemoine as Morpho, pet werewolf of deranged artist Klaus Tiller, about to ravish one of the 'Red Lips' girls, Diana (Janine Reynaud).  
Bottom: Rosanna Yanni as Regina, Diana's cohort in the Red Lips duo, poses as a wealthy art patron (left) and cunningly disguises her voice on the telephone (right).





their own death agonies). As can be seen here, Franco's macabre sensibility is running riot outside of pure horror, a tendency that would flourish even more in the 1970s and 1980s.

So this is a qualified success; by no means a work of genius but a hell of a lot of fun. Although comprehending the plot is sometimes akin to reading a map in a mirror, it can be done, even if the experience is a little disorientating. At first glance the film is all fingers and thumbs, but once you synchronise your perception you begin to recognise the wit and lightness of touch Franco brings to bear. *Sadisterotica* is easily the most amusing and accomplished of his comedies, and makes you wish for a string of three or four further entries in the 1960s 'Red Lips' saga.

**Franco on screen:** Franco plays Napoleon Bolivard, a night attendant who looks after a modern art collection, surveying the various female sculptures in their postures of agony before muttering "*Disgusting!*" Fresh-faced and healthy, Franco looks as full of the joys of living here as we'll ever see him on screen.

**Cast and crew:** The most interesting of the supporting cast is the multi-talented Michel Lemoine, actor, writer and director, almost unrecognisable here as the lycanthropic Morpho. Lemoine turned writer/director in the 1970s and went on to make a trio of erotic films starring himself and Janine Reynaud, *Wie kurz ist die Zeit zu lieben* (1970), *Marianne Bouquet* (1972), *The Bitches* (1973), before moving on to mainstream erotica with *Les Confidences érotiques d'un lit trop accueillant* (1973) and the amusing Euro-horror oddity *Les Week-ends maléfiques du Comte Zaroff* (1976) ... 'Vittorio' is supposed to be a sexy Italian lothario, but Brazilian born Manolo Otero's (dubbed) accent veers more towards Pakistan ... Producer Karl Heinz Männchen can be glimpsed and heard briefly in the Galeria Fellú, playing an art critic.

**Music:** Jerry van Rooyen's score for the US version is so feverishly exciting that when Jess Franco was awarded his Goya in 2010, it was the theme for *Sadisterotica* that scored the montage of Franco images prior to the maestro taking the stage. Swinging, sexy and full of fun, it's the perfect accompaniment to this cheerfully bizarre film. Born Gerard van Rooijen in the Netherlands, the composer moved to Germany in 1965 and hooked up with producers Adrian Hoven and Pier Caminnecki: as well as scoring all three of Franco's Aquila Films, he wrote the music for several other Aquila productions: Ramón Comas's spy spoof *Death on a Rainy Day* (1967); Hoven's own directorial effort *Mark of the Devil Part II* (1968); *Succubus*'s unofficial 'sequel' *Wie kurz ist die Zeit zu lieben* (1970), and UK horror director Freddie Francis's Caminnecki-financed horror flick *The Vampire Happening* (1971), which was the last of the Aquila films. Rooyen died in 2009 ... The score on the Spanish edition, by Fernando García Morcillo, is less exciting, leaning on slower jazz numbers and some rather square 'dance tunes' which lack the hip Sixties fizz of the Rooyen contributions. Morcillo had previously written songs for *Vámpiresas 1930* and *Dr. Orloff's Monster*, and would work again with Franco on *Un silencio de tumba* (1972), *Sola ante el terror* (1983), *Los blues de la calle Pop* (1983), *Las chicas del*

*tanga* (1983) and *Cuanto Cobra una espía?* (1984). A couple of cues are recognisably the work of an uncredited Daniel White, including one (during a sexy floor show in which a woman cuts her outfit with scissors) that reprises a haunting theme from *The Diabolical Dr. Z*.

**Studios:** Filmed at Estudios Roma, S.A. (Madrid).

**Locations:** The Red Lips girls live at La Torre de Cabo Roig, a converted military watchtower on Calle de Torrón, about fifty miles south of Alicante. (There are numerous examples of these structures dotted along the coast of Southern Spain, many of them built in the sixteenth century to guard against attacks by Barbary pirates.) Other Spanish exteriors were filmed in La Manga del Mar Menor, Balneario de Fortuna, Archena, Portman, Madrid, and Marbella, with additional shooting in Munich (West Germany).

**Connections:** This freewheeling comedy reaches all the way back to Franco's second film *Labios rojos*, reviving the notion of two beautiful female private investigators operating outside the law but on the side of the angels ... Similarities with Franco's favourite TV show *The Avengers* are rife: the two girls investigate crimes seemingly on a whim, just as Steed and Mrs. Peel seemed not so much establishment lackeys, more free agents, at play within a world part-real, part make-believe. The Red Lips' apartment with its genteel clutter and wrought iron spiral staircase suggests both Steed and Mrs. Peel's stylish abodes, and Jerry van Rooyen's score even quotes the prolonged rattle of glockenspiel in the title music for the colour Diana Rigg episodes. The girls assume British manners and verbal idioms ("*Chin-chin*" says Diana, toasting the statue that will later disgorge a human occupant), although they're a great deal more Latin in their sensuality ... The film owes a major debt to Roger Corman's *A Bucket of Blood* (1959), with its dead bodies turned into sculptures (see also *Plaisir à trois*, 1973), and (probably coincidentally) recalls Herschell Gordon Lewis's *Color Me Blood Red* (1965), with its artist who needs real human blood to capture his artistic muse effectively on canvas ... Breaking the fourth wall will become a regular habit for Franco (see *Les Grandes Emmerdeuses*, 1974, *Midnight Party*, 1975, *El sexo está loco*, 1981): here Regina gazes at the camera in mock outrage as she's about to rise nude from her bed and says "*A girl can't just get out of bed without anything on!*" A negligée is handed to her from off camera and the scene continues ... The notion of a woman posing as a statue before attacking a man is borrowed and improved upon from *Attack of the Robots* ... There are three werewolves on the loose in Franco's cinema and one of them turns up here; the others are in *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein* (1971) and, in a blink-and-you'll-miss-him appearance, *The Lustful Amazon* (1973) – oddly it's this one, played by Michel Lemoine in an otherwise knockabout comedy, who's actually the most frightening ... The Flamingo Club, a recurring Franco nightclub venue, appears again, as do the names Morpho, Tanner and Radeck ... For the first time we meet a policeman called Malou, a name destined to crop up several times in Franco's films of the 1970s.

**Other versions:** The American cut, *Sadisterotica*, differs from the Spanish, *El caso de las dos bellezas*, in several ways. To begin with, in *Sadisterotica* the credit sequence is interpolated for no good reason smack in the middle of the opening scene, in which a model wearing a wedding dress gets changed in front of a mirror. In the Spanish version the credits roll *after* the lycanthrope has attacked the girl and dragged her away. However, *El caso de las dos bellezas* cuts the first occasion when Tiller photographs the creature molesting a female victim. As this is the essence of how Tiller's art is created, the Spanish version loses much by concealing it. (The second such attack is retained in its entirety, probably because it's less explicit and takes place in a darkened room.) *Sadisterotica* intercuts Regina's theft of the painting with shots of the sleepy caretaker, essentially giving more pace to the scene than it has in *El caso de las dos bellezas*, and the same goes for the removal of around two minutes of crime scene dialogue between Chris Howland's Inspector Malou and Marcelo Arroita-Jáuregui's Inspector Tanner. Most regrettably, the Spanish cut is too shy to show the cage-dancing brunette waving her bosoms at the camera during an extended nightclub sequence (a shame; it's a spirited performance that really pumps up the party atmosphere). The few remaining alterations include *Sadisterotica*'s removal of the Spanish version's gloomy 'North African' establishing shots and the loss of Inspector Tanner's final comment to the fourth wall at the end.

**Problematica:** The following actors currently listed on IMDb do not appear in the film: Claudia Gravy and Julio Pérez Tabernero. Similarly, Spanish actor Milo Quesada, listed by a number of sources, does not in fact appear.

**Press coverage:** The film was generally well-received in the Spanish press, with Barcelona's *La Vanguardia* noting that, "El caso de las dos bellezas aims, particularly, at a few goals that are not exclusively 'terrifying'. What is desired, above all, is that what we see on the screen has a pronounced sensual quality. Jesús Franco, a man who knows his craft very thoroughly, achieves this purpose with noticeable ease. Judging by the delight that prevails in the room throughout the projection, viewers enjoy it. Taking into account the limited artistic ambitions of the film, which is essentially commercial and spectacular, two very closely related conditions, it must be appreciated among the most fun we've seen recently. But of course on the condition that the critic does not have to appraise it too much. The production does not go beyond mediocre and the plot openly tends towards nonsense. However, the group of actresses who interpret it are more than enough to make us forget – or excuse – such frailties."<sup>3</sup> *ABC Andalucía*, however, tempered their praise with an implication that Franco was squandering his artistic potential: "The plot is full of gruesomeness, which manages the typical elements of horror films with good doses of humour and action; above all, violence and eroticism, served up on a grand scale. The viewer spends the film entertained; it captures your attention ... To this objective all has been subordinated throughout the film by Jesús Franco, the young Spanish filmmaker who in recent years, abandoning all artistic efforts, has decided on a completely commercial and dynamic cinema at all costs."<sup>4</sup>

## KISS ME MONSTER

Spain & West Germany 1967

Spanish depósito legal number: M-2623-1968

*Original theatrical title in country of origin*

**Bésame monstruo** (SP theatrical)

**Küss mich Monster** (AT theatrical)

*Production companies*

**Films Montana S.A.** (Madrid)

**Aquila Films** (Munich)

*Theatrical distributors*

**Ismael González Díaz** (Madrid)

**Joseph Green Pictures** (USA)

**Filmzentrum** (Vienna)

**Atlas International** (Duisberg) [international sales]

*Timeline*

Shooting date	Nov-December	1967
Austria premiere	31 May	1969
Barcelona	02 February	1970
Seville	13 March	1970
Madrid	03 July	1972
USA (MPAA rating)	November	1972
USA (Charleston WV)	29 March	1974

*Theatrical running time*

Spain	87m
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**Cast:** **Janine Reynaud** (Diana). **Rosanna Yanni** (Regina). **Adrian Hoven** (Eric Vicas, Agent XP-347-10 of Interpol). **Chris Howland** (Inspector Francis 'Mac' Malou of Interpol). **Manolo [Manuel] Velasco** (Andy Pereira). **Ana Casares** (Linda, aka 'scandal mistress'). **Carlos Mendy** (Linda's assistant). **Michel Lemoine** (Jacques Maurier, aka Professor Jack Bertrand, a composer). **Barta Barri** (Inspector Kramer of Interpol/the real Professor Bertrand). **Marta Reves** (Irina, 'Princess', cult leader). **Nélida Quirogo** (Mrs. Bertrand). **Manuel Otero** (Dimitri). **Fernando de Rojas**. **María Antonia Redondo** (Bulumba, Irina's assistant). **Gregorio de Mora**. **Blow Up** (band). *uncredited:* **Jess Franco** (Abilene sect contact). **Caroline Rivière** (girl in front of Victoria Hotel). **Karl Heinz Männchen** (man at bar).

**Credits:** director: **Jess Franco**. story: **Karl-Heinz Mannchen**. screenplay: **Jess Franco** / **Luis Revenga** [GER prints add]. German adaptation: **Gerd Günter Hofmann**. directors of photography: **Jorge Herrero** / **Franz Hofer** [GER prints add]. editors: **Francisco Velázquez & Maruja Soriano**. art directors:







*This page, from Sadisterotica:*

*Tiller's housekeeper (Ana Casares) watches the preparations for Diana's death. Morpho (Michel Lemoine) and Tiller (Adrian Hoven) gloat over the captured Diana. Diana (Janine Reynaud) is chained and terrorised.*

*Facing page, from Kiss Me Monster:*

*Bullied by his psychopathic 'associate' Dimitri (Manuel Otero, left), Jacques Maurier (Michel Lemoine) prepares to operate on Princess Irina (Marta Reves) while one of the Andros slaves awaits further orders. Rosanna Yanni (left), Manolo Otero (middle) and Janine Reynaud (right) pose for a publicity shot on the Red Lips apartment set (though Otero's character never actually visits the apartment in the film). Judging by the girls' costumes, the photo was taken on the day a scene was shot in which a messenger boy is killed after delivering a clue to the Red Lips girls. Diana and Regina pose as a saxophone duo whilst investigating the Abilene sect.*











**Carlos Viudes / Graf Pilati** [GER prints]. music: **Fernando García Morcillo / Jerry van Rooyen** [GER prints]. additional music: **Daniel White**. producers: **José López Moreno / Adrian Hoven** [GER prints]. production manager: **Karl-Heinz Mannchen**. production supervisor: **Jesús García Gargoles**. 1st assistant production: **Ramón Escribano**. 2nd assistant production: **Salvador Casado**. assistant director: **Francisco Lara Polop**. continuity: **José Manuel Goyanes**. camera operator: **Ricardo Poblete**. camera assistant: **Carlos de Las Heras**. still photography: **Joachim Jung**. assistant editor: **María Elisa Valero**. assistant art director: **Vicente Criado**. set construction: **Tomás Fernández**. property master: **Ramón G'Argudo**. tailoring: **Magdalena Fernández**. make-up: **Manolita García de Ponte**. assistant make-up: **Pepita del Blanco**. electrical equipment: **Abamova**. furniture & properties: **Mateos-Luna-Mengibar / Vereinigte Werkstätten** (Munich) [GER prints]. wardrobe for Janine Reynaud & Rosanna Yanni: **Modas Fans**. general wardrobe: **Peris Hermanos**. laboratories: **Fotofilm Madrid** (Spain) & **Geyer-Werke** (Germany). titles: **S. Film – Pablo Núñez**. post-synchronisation: **Arcofón S.A.**. English version: **S&L Film – Synchron GmbH** (Berlin) - director of dialogue: **Charles M. Wakefield**. uncredited: 2nd assist. director: **Vicente Molina Foix**.

**Synopsis:** *Two female investigators, Diana and Regina (aka the Red Lips girls), are drawn into a web of mystery on the island of Lo Pagán involving the search for a missing serum created by Dr. Bertrand, scientist and occasional composer of Spanish folk songs, who has recently disappeared after skipping court on a murder charge. Bertrand had discovered a way to make artificial human beings, but – unfortunately for those who would like to exploit his discovery – his formula has gone missing too. Various interested parties would like to get their hands on it, chiefly a lesbian sect led by Princess Irina, who wants to create an army of women without the need for men, and a rich gay couple who want to conquer the world with an army of muscular male slaves. Hiring the Red Lips girls to obtain the serum is a mysterious religious order called The Abilines, who are willing to pay \$80,000. As their investigation continues, Diana and Regina meet numerous oddballs and would-be charmers: Vicas, a secret agent posing as a playboy; Dimitri, Professor Bertrand's scientific assistant, and Andy Pereira, whose attempt to woo the Red Lips girls is really a ruse on behalf of Irina...*

**Production notes:** Unusually, *Bésame monstruo* aka *Kiss Me Monster* made its screen debut in Austria, on 31 May 1969. A Barcelona release followed on 2 February 1970, just eight months after its sister film *Sadisterotica*. (Catalonian fans of the 'Red Lips' duo must have been thrilled to see them turn up twice in such a short space of time!) In Madrid, however, the film dropped out of sight for a couple of years until it re-emerged on an unlikely double bill with blaxploitation classic *Shaft*. Sadly, neither of the Red Lips films played theatrically in the UK; Franco fans had to wait until the latter days of videotape to enjoy them. They did however receive

an airing in the USA in the early 1970s, but there appears to be no record of a German release, despite the German co-financing.

**Review:** So garbled that it makes twin production *Sadisterotica* seem a paragon of lucidity, the bizarrely entertaining *Kiss Me Monster* achieves a surreal incoherence. "At this point I don't understand anything anymore", says Inspector Malou, two minutes into the film; I lost count of the number of times I said the same thing. Characters come and go with so little emphasis you barely have time to register if they're important or peripheral before the next scene begins. The inarticulate English dubbing doesn't help, tilting the chair of comprehensibility back on its hind legs so far that logic falls on its ass. Franco is clearly aiming for another dish of the wisecracking sophisticated nonsense he achieved in *Sadisterotica*, but at times the dialogue turns to bewildering word-soup, a minestrone of non-sequiturs. Against the odds, though, the result is once again wonderfully engaging.

But first, beware. The English-language version gets off to a bad start with a confusing pre-credits conversation between Rosanna Yanni's sexy vamp and Chris Howland's Inspector Malou (the latter returning from *Sadisterotica* in a scene that expects us to recognise him). Howland is atrociously dubbed, and the subsequent credits play over an immensely unappealing shot of a plane coming in to land which freeze-frames whenever a name appears on screen. It's a credit sequence with hiccups, an embarrassment from which even the most elegant of dramas would struggle to recover, and what follows is even more perplexing: a black and white car chase, edited into this otherwise colour film from goodness knows where, with zero significance to the story. Frankly, *Kiss Me Monster* would play a great deal better if the first four minutes were cut entirely. (It therefore comes as a relief to discover that Franco's original *Bésame monstruo* contains none of this material).

Once we're introduced to our heroines the film improves tremendously. We're back in the company of the Red Lips girls, Regina (Yanni) and Diana (Reynaud), which is cause enough for celebration. Their banter is quick and amusing, and although, as before, there's a better version just a careful dub away, the playful relationship so important to *Sadisterotica* remains intact. There's even a return to Franco's modernist preoccupations: Regina and Diana (working undercover as a sexy nightclub act) are instructed to perform a strip-tease but instead they discuss the conventions of stripping while disrobing at the same time. Hardly *Vivre sa vie*, but clever stuff for a film of this sort. Later, a seduction seems set to end in murder when Diana spends an evening with Vicas (Hoven) whose caresses turn to strangulation: that is, until the throttling is interrupted by Vicas's teenage daughter, reclining on a seat in the next room, shouting, "Bravo! It wasn't badly played, that number, just a bit drawn out." Vicas's strangulation, it seems, was just a jolly pantomime to encourage Diana to reveal her contacts.

When it comes to eroticism, Franco is straining at the leash by now. Lesbian sexuality is a vital undercurrent in *Kiss Me Monster*,

although this being a Spanish film under the regime of General Francisco Franco, only at a verbal and conceptual level. Regina is abducted by a lesbian organisation who have moved to an island to get away from men, who they blame for screwing up the world. From their Sapphic retreat they plot a separatist coup (although they don't mind drugging, shackling and caging a 'sister' when circumstance demands it). Meanwhile, there's a very strange (though never explicitly declared) gay relationship going on between Jacques Maurier and his boss Dimitri, the latter played by Manolo Otero, the irritating playboy from *Sadisterotica*, who looks far more at home here as an immaculately groomed sadist. Dimitri has created 'The Andros', a race of musclemen who run around in skimpy red briefs, while Maurier struts around the chateau with two large dogs on leashes. The whole set-up screams 'pervy gay couple' but as the film was made in 1967 it's just a little too early for such matters to be declared explicitly. Nevertheless, *Kiss Me Monster* is a bold Spanish film to make in the climate of the day; its frivolity has the jittery feel of nervous subversion. It's as though Jess Franco is pushing the limits of sexual propriety under cover of comedy. In this context, the film's improvisational absurdity dances on a knife-edge; anarchic hostility beneath a veil of silliness.

*Kiss Me Monster* is great fun for those with broad-minded Eurotrash tastes, but there are times when the story's gad-flightiness irritates more than it amuses. Various plot ideas are advanced, promising much, only to recede again barely explored. Franco cameos as a mystery man with information for the two heroines, but he's felled by a flying dagger before he can offer a single word, which makes the time it took to set up the scene essentially pointless (it's repeating a sight gag from *Lucky the Inscrutable* too, but quickly this time). Franco is aiming for surreal frivolity containing just enough plot information to maintain a forward momentum, but the hand that whips the soufflé must be firm; *Kiss Me Monster* would have gained immensely from another writer going through the script asking what each scene was trying to achieve and how it related to the whole. Given that we're dealing with a mainstream film in a widely popular genre, rather than one of Franco's oneiric personal fantasies, I think it's fair to ask for just a bit more coherence and structure.

In almost every Franco film there is at least one visual concept or moment of inspiration that reminds you what a talent he is. Here it's a bravura sequence at a beautiful rural windmill. The key to the mystery is contained in a piece of sheet music called 'Molino del viejo diablo' ('The Mill of the Old Devil'), and Regina, supposedly the ditzy one of the Red Lips duo, suggests that the sails of an old country windmill implicated in the story might correspond to the musical notes of the score, acting like the tumblers on a safe. And she's right: turning the sails in the right order unlocks a secret compartment. The idea is utterly bizarre, but thanks to Franco's alertness to the possibilities of location, and his lateral thinking when it comes to the plot, it works like a charm. Okay, so there are eight sails on the windmill and only seven different notes in

the major scale (twelve if you count chromatically) but let's not quibble over details! The scene has wit, visual beauty, and an off-the-wall quality that shows Franco at his idiosyncratic best.

*Kiss Me Monster* may be 'out of tune' here and there but if you roll with the discords and quit worrying about plot and structure – i.e. the sort of stuff that bores Franco to death after three pages of scriptwriting – there's a lot of pleasure to be had. Observed casually, *Kiss Me Monster* races by like an eccentric but amusing jalopy, perhaps hitting more than the usual number of plot-holes, but seeming to hold the road. On the other hand, if you scrutinise it scene by scene, and pay attention to every line, it's incredibly off the wall. So if you have a taste for the bizarre why not give this delirious film a spin? You never know, it might even make sense!

**Franco on screen:** Franco plays a mysterious contact for the Abiline sect, passing vital information to the Red Lips girls before being stabbed in the back by a knife-throwing musclemans.

**Cast and crew:** As the Red Lips girls enter the Hotel Victoria, a dark-haired young woman mutters a warning to them on the stairs. This is Caroline Rivière, Franco's step-daughter by his first wife Nicole Guettard, in her first screen role for Franco ... Producer Karl Heinz Männchen can again be spotted, this time applauding the Red Lips girls during their strip show ... At the time of *Kiss Me Monster*, Manolo (born Manuel) Otero was launching a parallel career in pop music, recording two singles in 1968 for Spanish Columbia ('¿Dónde vas?' and 'Nuestro Pueblo'). However, his musical fortunes lay fallow for six years until 1974, when he signed to EMI and scored a Continental hit with 'Todo El Tiempo Del Mundo', in which he speaks the lyric in a sexy baritone à la Telly Savalas's 'If' ("And I still feel the heat/In our bodies/Between the sheets/They were a wonderful jail/From which we were reluctant to flee"). The steaminess sits strangely with a tune now more familiar to British audiences as the Johnny Mathis Christmas hit 'When a Child is Born' – but Otero got there first! A string of eleven albums followed; he died in 2011 at the age of 68.

**Music:** As with *Sadisterotica*, for the American cut Jerry van Rooyen provides a score full of vivacity, with brash horns and spritely jazz riffs replacing the Spanish version's rather more sedate jazz score by Fernando García Morcillo. Additional music for *Bésame monstruo* was provided by Daniel White, this time (unlike *El caso de las dos bellezas*) credited onscreen.

**Studios:** Filmed at Estudios Roma, S.A. (Madrid).

**Locations:** Murcian locations predominate: La Manga del Mar Menor, Archena, Portman, and Balneario. The Red Lips girls once again reside in La Torre de Cabo Roig, and there was further shooting in Madrid, Marbella, and (allegedly) some interior shooting in Munich. Franco's flair for interesting locations includes a quarry full of half-destroyed houses. Most impressively, a key scene is played out at a gorgeous rural location dotted with old windmills.

**Connections:** As with *Sadisterotica*, the dominant influence on *Kiss Me Monster* is *The Avengers* TV series. "Wherever we turn up,



people die like flies," says Regina, as Diana casually studies a music manuscript delivered to their door by a violinist who receives a knife in the back the moment he hands it over. Diana plucks the music from the dead man's hand and heads off to the sofa to play the tune on an acoustic guitar. This flippant approach to death, in which clues are prioritised over corpses, is *The Avengers* through and through. It's as if Kathy Gale (i.e. the masculine Janine Reynaud) and Tara King (the scatterbrained Rossana Yanni) have decided to leave Steed and strike out on their own. The flippancy is even more pronounced in the Spanish version; for instance, the girls continue wisecracking about the actor Paul Newman (see *Sadisterotica*) and sundry inconsequential topics as they load the dead violinist into their car. The club at which the fake Bertrand is fake-stabbed is referred to by his (fake?) wife as 'The Calibia', but it's clearly called The Flamingo Club: the name is written over the door, and it's referred to as such in the Spanish dialogue.

**Other versions:** Close comparison of the English and Spanish-language versions is likely to induce headaches, so let's reach for the Paracetamol and forgive me if I skirt a few subtleties here and there. The first thing to note is that the Spanish DVD of *Bésame monstruo* reveals the correct title sequence (a drawing of women's legs against a red curtain, with a blood-soaked male body on the floor between them) dispensing with the dog's breakfast that kicks off *Kiss Me Monster*. Next, it's worth pointing out that *Kiss Me Monster* borrows footage from *Sadisterotica*, namely a sexy girl in a red dress wriggling around on a dance-floor. It also borrows material to be found exclusively in *El caso de las dos bellezas* (the Spanish version of *Sadisterotica*) namely the encounter with Malou pre-credits. Neither of these borrowings appear in *Bésame monstruo*, which is structured quite differently. Numerous scenes in *Kiss Me Monster* are reshuffled from their original placement (notably the death of the fake Professor Bertrand) and the dialogue rewritten to account for it, which may explain why the already delirious plot is so incomprehensible... The first encounter between Diana, Regina, Malou and 'Inspector Kramer' is longer in the Spanish version, while the English-language version ruins one of Franco's most elegant scene transitions; when Kramer demands an explanation of the Red Lips' recent activities, Franco cues a flashback by tracking into a lampshade, holding there for a couple of seconds, and then continuing the tracking shot to reveal the room now darkened, with a thunderstorm outside and the girls fast asleep in bed, thus changing the time frame in one continuous movement. It's a wonderfully Hitchcockian stylistic device performed with great skill. In the English-language version, however, the track into the lampshade is crudely bisected with a flip-edit, of the kind that Irwin-Allen Productions might have favoured for an episode of *Time Tunnel*.

From here on, virtually the whole of *Kiss Me Monster* is told in flashback. Credits and pre-credits aside, the narrative is book-ended by just two scenes in which Interpol's Malou and Kramer interview Diana and Regina, whereas the Spanish version returns

three more times to their conversation, a superior strategy which helps to anchor the complicated narrative and re-emphasise the dual time frame.

Among numerous other changes, two and a half minutes of sexy dancing in a jazz club have been added to *Kiss Me Monster*, along with a brief but gory heart operation and a forty second whipping with one of Maurier's beefcake creatures welting a pantie-clad brunette. The vital song which the girls hear being played on guitar by an old man at the seafront is musically and lyrically different in the two versions. In *Kiss Me Monster* the lyric mentions the word 'Abiline', which provides a clue to Diana who saw the same word in the sheet music earlier: the man also sings the phrase 'Red Lips', which is one of only two uses of the phrase in the English dialogue (the violinist delivered sheet music "*for the Red Lips*" earlier). Everyone else avoids the term, referring to our heroines as "the girls" "the two girls" or in one instance, "the famous twins"! In *Bésame monstruo*, however, the term "Labios rojos" is used repeatedly, and the man on the seafront (actually the head of the Abilines) clearly sings the phrase "*Molino del viejo diablo*" which, as it's the title on Bertrand's sheet music, provides a far more tangible clue!

*Kiss Me Monster* excises some shots from *Bésame monstruo*, for instance a scene where Vicas's daughter sees Diana seduce and then karate-chop her father. In the Spanish version these shots are just puzzling; they climax with the daughter raising a gun to fire, but then she rushes away and we never see her again! Perhaps it's a plot strand Franco didn't have time to shoot? Perhaps the Spanish video is incomplete? Perhaps the child actor played hooky that day? Never mind; just add it to the pile of questions for which we may never receive an answer! Finally, *Kiss Me Monster* adds a quip about Nietzsche that does not occur in the Spanish version.

**Press coverage:** Whereas the first Red Lips film was fairly well received, this second effort was universally derided. *ABC Andalucía* began the deluge of bad press by saying, "If the first film, although of poor quality, had some interest and spark, this second episode cannot even make this claim. The story, coarse and grotesque, reveals in its cinematographic construction a series of faults that would take too long to enumerate. Suffice it to mention a passage in which some individuals belonging to a secret sect appear, dressed in cloaks, hoods and masks, provoking the audience's hilarity. We will therefore not expand more on the second output of this female couple. Only that we hope there is no third installment."<sup>1</sup> There was a scathing review, too, from *ABC Madrid*: "Some cinema directors are determined to waste celluloid without setting out to do anything minimally serious. *Bésame monstruo*, an example of vulgarity and bad execution, is a sample of poor use of film." Complaining about the "naïve plot" and "forced situations", the reviewer went on to declare that "Rosanna Yanni looks like a novice in front of the camera" before concluding that the film was "a deplorable comedy that with a little bit of cinematic taste might have been a decent timewaster".<sup>2</sup> Reviewed in *Cinefantastique* in September 1976, the film was also hammered by critic Jeffrey Frentzen: "Mundane as hell. Another no-class Franco hack-job to be avoided at all costs."

# MR. TOWERS, MR. UNGER & MR. PREVIN

by Julian Grainger

It is fair to say that Jess Franco's best-known films - and those most widely distributed - are the ones he made with English producer Harry Alan Towers. Less has been written about another key Franco collaborator, the American producer Oliver Unger, without whom the films would probably never have been made. Their collaborations shed some light on the complicated, not to say ingenious, methods employed to make multi-country co-productions and why Towers and co. "never lost a dime".

After a stint in the RAF during WWII, Towers became a tremendously successful radio producer. In the mid-1950s he saw the coming of independent television in the UK and through his company Towers of London (incorporated in 1946) he supplied quantities of star-laden dramas to the nascent ITV, as well as serving on the board of Associated British Corporation (ABC). Towers went on to produce an enormous number of high-quality programmes; an enthusiast for 'sponsored' television, he made series such as *Martin Kane*, *Private Investigator* and *Dial 999* in co-production with equally prolific American television syndication and production company ZIV Television Programs. It was during this period that he became known as 'the Orson Welles of Europe'.

Towers socialised with the great - if not necessarily the good - and this was to lead to disaster. On 6 March 1961, a New York court charged Towers with violation of the White Slave Traffic Act<sup>1</sup> by "conspiracy, enticing Maria [sic] Novotny (19) into prostitution, and living on the earnings of a prostitute." On 12th April he appeared before a Grand Jury and on the 25th pleaded not guilty to five charges.<sup>2</sup> His trial was set for 16th May 1961 but by this time Towers had fled the US for Europe, forfeiting his - for the time - not inconsiderable bail of \$5,000. (Intriguingly, his bail had been reduced from \$10,000 in spite of the District Attorney's attempts to increase it to \$25,000.) Although at this point Towers became a high-profile fugitive from the US authorities, the case seems to have been pursued with little zeal (possibly because - as John Simkin notes - it may all have been an "MI5/CIA honeytrap operation").<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless the case put a spoke in the wheel of Towers' trans-Atlantic wheeler-dealing because he couldn't step foot on US soil. As a result, he was to become one of the first truly international producers, who - as he liked to claim - could set up a film within twenty-four hours of landing in any given country.

July 1963 found Towers producing an adaptation of the Edgar Wallace novel *Sanders of the River* as *Death Drums along the River*, on location in Durban with funding from British, South African and German sources. These multi-country co-productions were able to

access various local monies/tax-break schemes which ensured that as long as the budgets were kept to a minimum, the films were very probably in profit before hitting a paying audience. Crucially, a mooted US release by Embassy Pictures under the title *Sanders* failed to materialise and it's interesting to speculate whether the producer's reputation scared off potential US distributors. Nevertheless Towers made two more titles (*Victim 5* - South Africa again - and *City of Fear* - Austria) and proved once again that he could produce films that were completed on schedule and within budget. It was around this time (1964) that Towers signed a deal with American producer-distributor Oliver A. Unger, a compact that would have a significant bearing on the careers of both Towers and Jess Franco over the next six years.

Born in 1914, Unger joined the business in 1935, initially working for foreign film importer and distributor Jack Hoffberg. Within two years he had become Vice-President of the company. In 1954 he founded National Telefilm Associates (NTA) along with executives Ely Landau and Harold Goldman. NTA distributed TV series available for syndication to television stations not affiliated with the 'big three' US television networks - NBC, CBS, and ABC - as well as handling the Twentieth Century-Fox film library. The company was tremendously successful. Unger left NTA in 1961 and with Ely Landau formed distribution entity The Landau-Unger Company.<sup>4</sup> This outfit functioned primarily as an intermediary, purchasing US and Canadian rights to quality films and placing them with established US distributors. In the US it was Allied Artists Pictures which handled much of the company's product, while in Canada these duties went to Elite Films.

Ely Landau meanwhile had formed his own production company and in 1964 he was behind Sidney Lumet's highly-praised *The Pawnbroker*. Like his partner, Unger also hankered to be a producer and the deal with Towers was an excellent fit: via the highly respectable Unger, Towers could access the all-important American film and television market and via Towers, Unger could co-produce a significant volume of popular genre films with which to feed his ever-growing distribution company. In 1964 Unger formed Unger Productions, Inc. (UPI), and by year's end had completed three films in co-production with Towers (*Mozambique*, *Coast of Skeletons* & *Sammy the Seal*) with another, *The Face of Fu Manchu*, ready to shoot in early 1965.

Previous Towers films now found their way onto US screens: *Victim 5* (1964, called *Code 7, Victim 5!* in the US) was picked up for release by Columbia while *City of Fear* (also 1964) came out



via Allied Artists (AA). However in November 1965 The Landau-Unger Company announced it was terminating its deal with AA and moving out of the distribution game. Instead, Unger would concentrate on production and he promptly announced another two Towers titles: a thriller entitled *Man without a Face* (retitled *Circus of Fear* in the UK and *Psycho-Circus* in the US) and a second Sax Rohmer adaptation, *The Brides of Fu Manchu*.

There was another reason for the announcement: Seven Arts Productions had been founded in 1957 by Ray Stark and Eliot Hyman to make films for release by other studios, however in 1964 it created a new subsidiary, Seven Arts Pictures, to distribute films directly to US cinemas and it was keen to release Unger's productions. According to *Variety*<sup>5</sup>, its initial acquisitions were two Landau-Unger/Towers films: *Ten Little Indians* (budget circa \$850,000, which was acquired for \$250,000 and achieved rentals of \$1,500,000) and *Face of Fu Manchu* (budget circa \$700,000, bought for \$200,000, rentals of \$1,000,000). Seven Arts was clearly satisfied with this arrangement because it went on to release another five Towers productions (plus *Sandy the Seal*, which went straight to television).

And still it wasn't enough. With so many films either completed, in production or in the planning stage, further US outlets were needed. In late December 1965 The Landau-Unger Company announced that it had signed another deal, this time with American International Pictures (AIP). Landau had scheduled no fewer than ten films for production in 1966, some of which would be going to AIP. Furthermore, AIP would also distribute Landau-Unger's existing library, including Towers' *Our Man in Marrakesh* and Michael Winner's *The Girl-Getters*. AIP also announced that it would be putting money directly into a number of new Towers productions, specifically *Rocket to the Moon* (re-titled *Those Fantastic Flying Fools*) and Sax Rohmer's *Sumuru* (aka *The Million Eyes of Sumuru*). AIP went on to finance and release Towers' *House of a Thousand Dolls* by Jeremy Summers in 1967 and would eventually release Jess Franco's *The Bloody Judge* as *Night of the Blood Monster* in 1972. Two earlier Franco titles were also released into US living rooms by American International Television: *El secreto del Doctor Orloff* (as *Dr. Orloff's Monster*) in 1966 and *Cartas boca arriba* (as *Attack of the Robots*) in 1967. With two US production-distribution deals in the bag via Unger, Towers now had so many sources of funding that it's likely that the only thing stopping him putting more even films into production was a shortage of scripts.

In the film industry, nothing stays static for very long. A. Bruce Rozet's Beverly Hills-based Commonwealth United Corporation (CUC) was a real-estate holding firm with interests in legitimate theatre and the record business. In August 1967 it moved into film production with its acquisition of The Landau-Unger Company, which it re-named Commonwealth United Entertainment Corporation (CUE), and the appointments of Oliver Unger and Harold Goldman to executive positions. CUC wanted to produce and distribute enough films in short order to become a 'mini-

major' film studio and this move included the acquisition of all the Landau-Unger titles in various stages of completion plus some pick-ups (already completed films made by other companies in search of distribution). The company also launched an ambitious slate of in-house projects with budgets that ranged from petite to gargantuan. If Commonwealth's importance to Franco's career has been underestimated, this is because its meteoric rise to prominence was swiftly followed by its demise, and many of the films it made were eventually released by other distributors.

Through Unger, Commonwealth had close ties with AIP and in December 1967 sold them distribution rights to three of its titles: the already-completed *Cervantes* (aka *The Young Rebel*), plus *The Desperate Ones* and the still-filming *The Day the Hot Line Got Hot*.

While still at the planning stage with its larger titles, CUE wanted to get the production ball rolling as soon as possible and reliable old Harry Towers was more than willing to oblige. Within a month of the CUC takeover of Landau-Unger, Towers had Franco shooting *The Blood of Fu Manchu* in Spain and Brazil. By the latter half of 1968, Commonwealth had some four films in production at any one time, rivalling the better-established AIP. Franco had started *99 Women* on the back of *The Girl from Rio* and was to complete the former prior to starting the bigger-budgeted *Justine*. *Castle of Fu Manchu*, was filmed in the autumn of 1968 on location in Spain and Turkey, followed swiftly by *Venus in Furs* in October. Commonwealth had fingers in other European pies as well: they put money into Massimo Dallamano's *A Black Veil for Lisa*, Umberto Lenzi's *Orgasmo* (released in the US as *Paranoia*) and Liliana Cavani's *The Year of the Cannibals* – all co-productions with Europe. Towers' ingenious method of production financing was now being used widely across the industry. With perhaps more than a hint of hubris, Commonwealth set its sights on larger, more respectable productions such as Bryan Forbes' *The Madwoman of Chaillot*, Veljko Bulajic's epic war film *The Battle of Neretva*, Stuart Burge's all-star adaptation of *Julius Caesar* and Joe McGrath's similarly star-laden 'hip' comedy *The Magic Christian*. In September 1969<sup>6</sup> Commonwealth announced its release schedule for the next twelve months and revealed that it had invested some \$13 million in the twenty-one films listed. But the company had a serious cash-flow problem: its large production slate was draining huge sums of money from the company and on top of this there were print and advertising costs for its many releases. Conversely, monies coming back into the company were a mere trickle. And the company was failing to win over the press, with *Variety* taking the unusual step of complaining publicly that the company wasn't holding press shows for the films before putting them into release.<sup>7</sup>

By mid-1969 Commonwealth had expanded its production activities to Britain and Australia and had also acquired a 50% interest in Munich-based distributor Nora Filmverleih and its production affiliate Hape Film (which put money into Jess Franco's *Eugenie... the Story of Her Journey into Perversion* and also co-produced Mario Bava's *Four Times that Night* and its

companion production, Franz Marischka's *Der Mann mit dem goldenen Pinsel*, aka *Let It All Hang Out*). In October 1968 Robert S. Eisen, previously of Producers Film Services, became head of post-production at Commonwealth and it was he and his editor brother Harry who would create the American versions of *99 Women* and *Venus in Furs*.

These co-productions were becoming increasingly complicated – just as Towers liked it. *Castle of Fu Manchu* was a Towers of London production but Towers didn't put his own money into films. His role was as the co-ordinator, the deal-maker who put the financing together. Production funding for *Castle* came from Nat Cohen and Stuart Levy's British distributor Anglo Amalgamated, which released AIP films to UK audiences, as well as from Commonwealth United in the USA. British prints make no mention of any companies other than Towers of London, meaning that the film would have been eligible for Eady Levy support as a 100% British film. (This was "a voluntary levy on a proportion of the price of cinema tickets; half retained by the exhibitors and half going to the makers of films made in the UK.")<sup>8</sup> The Americans, who receive no state subsidies whatever, couldn't care less which companies were credited, however European prints make no mention of either Towers of London, Commonwealth or Anglo Amalgamated, and describe the film as a Spanish-Italian-West German co-production! Spanish money came from Valentin Tubau's Barcelona-based Tilma Films (founded in 1965), which was allied with another 60s Catalan powerhouse, Producciones Cinematográficas Balcázar, in whose studios *Castle* was part-filmed. German money came from veteran company Terra-Filmkunst GmbH of Berlin (founded back in 1920), a prolific co-producer which also put money into *The Girl from Rio*, *99 Women*, *The Blood of Fu Manchu*, *Venus in Furs* and *The Bloody Judge*. The Italian end came from the similarly reliable Italian International Film (iif) of Rome, founded in 1958 by producer Fulvio Lucisano. By 1968, iif was a veteran of many US-Italian co-productions, having signed a deal with AIP back in 1960 for production of two films per year. This was the deal that gave the world Luigi Scattini's *Primitive Love*, Mario Bava's *Planet of the Vampires* and *Dr. Goldfoot and the Girl Bombs*, Buster Keaton in *War*, *Italian Style* and many others. The European companies would have been able to access their own government subsidies, made simpler – and more generous – with the apparent lack of US and British finance. So in all, Towers would have accessed at least six separate portions of production funding and four subsidies of one sort or another for just the one film. *Castle of Fu Manchu* came out in the UK via Anglo-EMI (Anglo Amalgamated having been bought out by Associated British Picture Corp.) and finally crept out in the US in 1972 via ultra-low budget distributor International Cinema Corp. The German release was handled by Towers' old associates Constantin-Film of Munich but curiously, there is no record of an Italian release. MGM took international rights and released the film in such territories as Australia and South America.

Meanwhile, Commonwealth was in serious financial trouble. A *Variety* report<sup>9</sup> in July 1970 put the company's unaudited losses for 1969 at a staggering \$61 million, and by the end of that year production had all but ceased, with Franco's *Count Dracula* and Dallamano's *Dorian Gray* two of the last Commonwealth titles to be completed. Things were so bad that the company was forced to sell its library to AIP and in June 1970 Unger left his position as head of CUE. With so many films either shooting, in post-production or ready for release, a significant number found themselves in distribution limbo, with Roddy McDowall's extraordinary directorial debut *Tam Lin* and Myron J. Gold's sweaty Mexico-filmed thriller *Savage Season* among them.

Although Commonwealth had already put *99 Women* and *The Blood of Fu Manchu* (as *Kiss & Kill*) into release in 1969, the company's financial collapse would delay the release of the remaining Franco films: with artwork bearing the Commonwealth name already complete for *Venus in Furs*, it was AIP which actually released the film in May 1970. An idea of the complexity of the distribution changes can be seen by following the trail of Franco's *Count Dracula*, which had also gone to AIP (who had the film rated by the MPAA in 1970 under the title *Dracula 71*). AIP then sold on the film to Crystal Pictures, Inc. of New York who finally released it to US audiences in 1973. A further release was handled by World Entertainment Corp. in 1978. Warner Bros. had also acquired distribution rights for some other English-speaking territories and their logo can be seen on posters dating back to 1973.

Another producer of whom Jess Franco talked admiringly was native New Yorker Steve Previn (although he mis-remembers Previn working for Roger Corman and Sam Arkoff, which didn't happen until the mid-1970s). Based in Europe in the 1950s and 60s, Previn (brother of composer André) directed episodes of such TV series as *Foreign Intrigue* and *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* as well as three two-parters for Disney, *Almost Angels* (1959), *Escapade in Florence* (1962), and *The Waltz King* (1963), all of which were released to cinemas in Europe. Moving away from the studio floor, circa 1967 Previn became a production assistant in Paramount's London office from whence he became their European production executive and worked on the huge *Monte Carlo or Bust* (1969) production. In 1969-70 he was European production executive for Commonwealth United and according to Franco, worked with him on both *Venus in Furs* and *Justine*. The latter title is interesting in this context but it raises the likelihood that Commonwealth United put money into *Justine*, even though I have yet to find evidence to support this theory. After his time at Commonwealth, Previn went on to executive produce Harold Becker's *The Ragman's Daughter* (1972) and also worked with Anthony B. Unger (Oliver's son) on Nicolas Roeg's *Don't Look Now* (1973). Furthering the perception that movie-making is an incestuous business, Previn was appointed European production executive for AIP in April 1975. Franco liked Previn so much that he named Mike Connors' character in *La punta de las viboras/Downtown* 'Steve Previn'.



## THE BLOOD OF FU MANCHU

Spain, West Germany, USA & UK 1967

Spanish depósito légal number: M-24195-1968

*Original theatrical title in country of origin*

**Fu Manchú y el beso de la muerte** (SP theatrical)

*Fu Manchu and the Kiss of Death*

**Der Todeskuss des Dr. Fu Man Chu** (GER theatrical)

*The Death-Kiss of Dr. Fu Man Chu*

**Sax Rohmer's "Kiss and Kill"** (US theatrical)

**Sax Rohmer's "The Blood of Fu Manchu"** (onscreen USA)

*Alternative titles*

**Der Todeskuss des Dr. Fu Manchu** (GER stills)

**Sax Rohmer's Kiss and Kill** (US trailer onscreen)

**Fu-Manchu e o Beijo da Morte** (BRA theatrical)

**Fu Manchu Dødens Kys** (DEN theatrical) *Fu Manchu's Kiss of Death*

**Fumanchu himon herra** (FIN theatrical) *Fumanchu Mr. Lust*

**Sangre de Fu Manchu** (ARG theatrical) *Blood of Fu Manchu*

**Against All Odds** (USA video)

**Fu Manchu and the Kiss of Death** (UK pre-release)

*Production companies*

**Ada Films** (Madrid)

**Terra-Filmkunst GmbH** (Berlin)

**Towers of London** (London)

**Commonwealth United Productions, Inc.** (Los Angeles)

© 1968. **Udastex Films** (New York/London) [GER prints]

© 1968. **Udastex Films Ltd** (London) [English-language prints]

*Theatrical distributors*

**C.E.A. Distribución** (Madrid)

**Constantin-Film** (Munich)

**Commonwealth United Entertainment, Inc.** (Los Angeles)

**Anglo-Amalgamated Film Distributors [through Warner-Pathé]** (London)

*Timeline*

Shooting date	30 Nov thru December	1967
UK 'A' cert issued	30 August	1968
USA (Detroit)	24 September	1969
Seville	02 March	1970
Barcelona	16 March	1970
Madrid	01 February	1971

*Theatrical running time*

Spain	92m
UK	61m23s
USA	92m

*Cast:* **Christopher Lee** (Fu Manchu). **Götz George** (Carl Jansen, archaeologist). **Maria Röhm** (Sister Ursula Wagner of the Mission Service). **Ricardo Palacios** (Sancho López, bandit leader). **Richard Greene** (Sir Dennis Nayland Smith). **Tsai Chin** (Lin Tang). **Howard Marion Crawford** (Doctor Ronald Petrie). **Marcelo Arroita-Jáuregui** (Governor Mexical). **Frances Kahn** (Carmen). **Loni Von Freidl** (Celeste). **Isaura de Oliveira** (Yuma, rebellious Fu Manchu acolyte). **Vicente Roca** (Thomas, the governor's butler). **Shirley Eaton** (Black Widow). *uncredited:* **Francesca Tu** (Lotus, Nayland Smith's assistant). **Rodolfo Arena** (mayor of Melia). **Jess Franco** (López's man attacking woman behind grill). **Rafael Albaicín** (Black Widow's victim). **Olivia Pineschi** (woman in Melia molested by López's bandit). **Sônia Beluomini**.

*Credits:* directed by **Jess Franco**. screenplay: **Harry Alan Towers** [as 'Peter Welbeck'], **Manfred R. Köhler**, **Jess Franco**. director of photography: **Manuel Merino**. editors: **Alan [Allan] Morrison** [ENG-lang/GER prints] / **Ángel Serrano** [SP prints] / **Waltraut Lindenau** [GER prints add]. art director: **Peter Gasper**. music: **Daniel White** [ENG-lang prints] / **Gert Wilden** [SP/GER prints add]. produced by **Harry Alan Towers**. production manager: **Juan Estelrich**. production supervisors: **Tibor Reves**, **Bob Lynn**, **Bruno Leder**. assistant directors: **Juan Estelrich**, **Reynald P. Barros**. continuity: **Carmen Salas**. camera operator: **Javier Pérez Zofio**. set decorator: **Hans Billian**. property master & special effects: **Jaime Rubio**. costumes: **Helga Lepinski**. make-up: **Stewart Freeborn**, **Mariano García**. stunt co-ordinator: **Rafael de la Rosa**. colour: **Eastmancolor**. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid, S.A.**. sound recording: **Fono España**. sound system: **Westrex Recording System**. sound: **Malcolm Stewart**. dubbing editor: **Bill Creed**. dialogue-director: **Manfred R. Köhler** [GER prints].

**Synopsis:** *An Inca legend states that certain women can be made immune to the venom of the otherwise deadly black cobra: from a fortress hideout somewhere in the South American jungle Fu Manchu and his devoted daughter Lin Tang plan to use this knowledge to assassinate their ten greatest enemies. Nayland Smith is first on the list. The "kiss of death" is administered by a beautiful woman who shows up at his London home. The woman is hit by a car and killed while fleeing the scene; Nayland Smith is struck blind. He recalls the old Inca myth of the 'kiss of death' and his research into the phenomenon reveals that he has six weeks to live. His constant friend and companion Dr. Petrie heads for South America; Nayland Smith is convinced Fu Manchu is hiding there. An intrepid German secret agent named Carl Jansen, currently working in the region, agrees to assist Petrie. Searching the jungle, Jansen avoids an ambush by the supervillain's henchmen, but ends up arrested by a local governor. Meanwhile Ursula Wagner, a beautiful young missionary, encounters the psychopathic bandit Sancho López, who takes over a small town on the edge of the jungle and allows his gang of cut-throats to rape*

*the women and pillage the place. Fu Manchu orders that this upstart should also be given the 'kiss of death' but the assassination attempt fails. López forms an uneasy alliance with Jansen, Petrie and Ursula as they seek Fu Manchu's lair and try to put a stop to his plans...*

**Production notes:** In the latter part of 1967 Franco met one of the reigning Barons of the independent co-production deal; British entrepreneur Harry Alan Towers. Franco made nine films with Towers during an intensely productive two-and-a-half-year period, including three Sax Rohmer adaptations, two adaptations of the Marquis de Sade, and a version of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. The casts included internationally established actors like Christopher Lee, Herbert Lom, Mercedes McCambridge, George Sanders, Klaus Kinski and Jack Palance. However, while the films went some way to establishing Jess Franco as an international name, with all of them receiving either UK or US distribution, cash flow was an issue behind the scenes. Towers was apt to spend the budget wining and dining the stars, leaving scarcely enough in the pot to finish the movie. Franco's roller-coaster ride with Towers climaxed with *The Bloody Judge*, a lavish historical witch-finder saga, and *Count Dracula*, an attempt at a faithful adaptation of Stoker's novel which fell some way short of its ambition. Reviewers were harsh and Franco's relationship with Towers deteriorated soon afterwards.

Born on the 19th October 1920, Harry Alan Towers formed his production company Towers of London after the war, initially to produce radio shows. Moving into television, he was responsible for successful shows like *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (ITC, 1955-1956) but after a period of over-expansion he found himself forced to declare bankruptcy. In the late 1950s he moved to the United States, which is where the 'colourful' stories really begin. He was arrested in New York in 1961 for running a call-girl racket: Maria Novotny, whose clients allegedly included President Kennedy and who became a bit-player in the Profumo affair, was said to have been a principal asset. Towers skipped bail and fled back to Eastern Europe, re-entering the film industry in 1963 with an adaptation of an Edgar Wallace story 'Sanders of the River' (retitled *Death Drums Along the River* for its UK release). From then on, Towers developed a strategy of lodging production money in tax havens such as Liechtenstein (money for Towers productions reputedly arrived on set in bags with an armed guard!).<sup>1</sup> Despite, or more likely because of this, he became a very busy man, with as many as seven or eight films in production in a year. In 1965, inaugurating a long infatuation with the work of Sax Rohmer, he made *The Face of Fu Manchu* with director Don Sharp. Filmed principally in Ireland, it saw Christopher Lee beginning a run of five performances as the villainous Oriental mastermind, two of which would be directed by Franco.

Towers was the first really strong producer Franco encountered, and a creative one too; he wrote the screenplays, he worked his contacts to provide the casts, and he held the purse strings. The financial structures behind these productions are notoriously

cloudy and complicated, but Franco always maintained that his own financial arrangement was with American International Pictures, the prominent US indie. (Franco was apparently recommended to AIP by Roger Corman, who'd been greatly impressed by *Succubus*.) However, only three of the Towers films were actually co-produced by AIP: the remainder were handled by a smaller company, Commonwealth United Entertainment (see "Mr. Towers, Mr. Unger & Mr. Previn", p.150).

Franco's first film with Towers was *The Blood of Fu Manchu*, shot in approximately three weeks from 30th November 1967. The assignment was a pleasure for Franco, who adored the work of Sax Rohmer and was thrilled to play a part in bringing some kind of adaptation to the screen. 'Some kind', because what Towers actually did, having obtained the rights to Rohmer's books, was to write his *own* Fu Manchu stories under his nom-de-plume Peter Welbeck, borrowing the trappings and characters but digressing wildly from the actual plots!

**Review:** Despite a few rough edges and some tardy editing, *The Blood of Fu Manchu* is a mildly entertaining entry in the basically absurd Fu Manchu series. Although noticeably less polished than the Towers productions directed by Don Sharp (*The Face of Fu Manchu* and *The Brides of Fu Manchu*), it holds its own pretty well, getting off to a cracking start with a bevy of bound women being led through a remote jungle pass to a cave in some unnamed country. Therein lurks Fu Manchu and his devoted daughter, Lin Tang. Fu Manchu's plan – fiendish, complicated and impractical, as befits a pulp super-villain – involves a rare breed of snake known only to the wise men of the area, one of whom has been tortured to relinquish the secret. The snake possesses a venom which turns women into obedient zombies. Better still, the victim thus controlled is also endowed with a literal 'kiss of death'. Just one smooch from the girl in question and it's curtains for the recipient.

Hero of the earlier Fu Manchu films, Nayland Smith, receives the venomous kiss when a mysterious young woman turns up at his London townhouse. Unfortunately the script has so far neglected to inform us that death is not instantaneous (although it appeared to be so for a test victim in Fu Manchu's lair). Instead it transpires we're dealing with 'The Kiss of *Eventual* Death' as Nayland Smith is first stricken blind, then has six weeks to find an antidote before the poison does its work! It's the sort of lazy/crazy scripting that betrays the lack of even a second draft, never mind a third or fourth. But that's scriptwriter 'Peter Welbeck' (aka Harry Alan Towers) for you: what else would you expect from someone who could write this exchange, worthy of Edward D. Wood: Carl Jansen: "Dr. Wagner's dead!" Commissioner: "Completely?"

The arrival of Ricardo Palacios playing sleazy bandit leader Sancho López is an irritation at first; his bad-guy bonhomie is laid on so thick that even Brian Blessed might blush. But as the film chugs along and the character develops, Palacios makes this smirking, drunken monster immensely watchable. Yes, he's evil –



he's a dirty double-crossing bandit, right? – but Palacios brings energy and hilarity to the film and knows how to make a meal of the part without being overly silly. I found myself wondering whether Franco based the character on his observances of Orson Welles, with whom he'd worked so closely two years before; it's easy to imagine the director of *Touch of Evil* making a similarly hearty meal of the role, and persuading you to like this black-hearted son-of-a-bitch despite your better instincts. One also has to say that Franco himself gets a little carried away: for instance, he scores the bandit attack on the townspeople (a montage of rapes, murders and robberies) to a cheery samba, as if the whole vicious affair is some kind of jolly Latin-American street party.

Narrative logic, one has to say, is not much in evidence. The scene in which female assassin Yuma is sent to administer the 'kiss of death' to López would have worked a lot better had she not given the game away first by kiss-and-killing another man at the same party. This does rather tip off the intended victim; how much better it would have been if López had figured out she was a killer some other way! But such are the vagaries of the script, replete with convenience and somewhat lacking in guile. The story drags a little in the last act, as various people duke it out amid the greenery of a Brazilian national park, with much squibless gunfire and running around. The essential pulp-fiction mood is maintained however, with Franco delivering something akin to a Saturday morning children's adventure serial with added sexy ladies. Of course, Fu Manchu is foiled again, like so many super-villains who return to be crushed *ad absurdum*. It would be fun one day to see a series of films in which good is repetitiously conquered by bad, but instead, like his contemporary, Wile E. Coyote, or his successor The Master in *Doctor Who*, Fu Manchu must undergo the indignity of defeat again and again. I know he's supposed to be the epitome of the inscrutable Oriental, but as yet another of his plans for world domination goes tits-up you have to wonder if he'd feel better dropping the pose and venting a little. How nice it would be to see him kick a passing lackey in the testicles, smash a few vials of coloured liquid and curse like a docker. Instead he murmurs his catchphrase, "*The world shall hear from me again*", which is admirably stoical but a lot less fun than a well-chosen swear word.

A swear word is the least one might expect from a Chinese viewer of the Fu Manchu films, given that they perpetuate the racist 'Yellow Peril' stereotype that's been swilling around in pulp fiction since the late 1800s. (Sax Rohmer's thirteen Fu Manchu novels began in 1913 with *The Mystery of Dr. Fu-Manchu* although fear of the 'Yellow Peril' was first exploited in an 1889 book called *The Yellow Danger* by M.P. Shiel). Rohmer's books are distinctly unsavoury in this respect, and among the films made from them, MGM's *The Mask of Fu Manchu* (1932) was particularly egregious: in it, a stentorian Englishwoman bellows "*You hideous yellow monster!*" at Boris Karloff's Fu Manchu, while the villain himself goads an assembly of 'Oriental' leaders to "*Kill the white man and take his women!*" Compared to this, Franco's Fu Manchu films are

less extreme, but the 'Orientalism' of the villain is still presumed to be sinister in and of itself. It's not as if something could not have been done to avoid racism; an honourable Chinese character assisting the good guys would have gone a long way towards ameliorating any insult, a solution that Atlas Comics hit upon in the late 1950s for their 'Yellow Claw' series, which featured Jimmy Woo, a handsome young Chinese-American FBI agent fighting a Communist mandarin who resembled a cross between Fu Manchu and Ming the Merciless. (In *The Blood of Fu Manchu*, a woman of Asian appearance plays 'Lotus', Nayland Smith's secretary, but she's too peripheral to the plot to count for anything.)

In Rohmer's books, Fu Manchu's schemes are just the spearhead of an imminent world-wide invasion from the East, and lest we be in any doubt that he is essentially a synecdoche for the mass of Far Eastern peoples, Nayland Smith refers to him in *The Mystery of Dr. Fu-Manchu* (1913) as "*the titanic genius whose victory meant the victory of the yellow races over the white*", adding: "*Imagine a person, tall, lean and feline, high-shouldered, with a brow like Shakespeare and a face like Satan, a close-shaven skull, and long, magnetic eyes of the true cat-green. Invest him with all the cruel cunning of an entire Eastern race, accumulated in one giant intellect, with all the resources of science past and present, with all the resources, if you will, of a wealthy government—which, however, already has denied all knowledge of his existence. Imagine that awful being, and you have a mental picture of Dr. Fu-Manchu, the yellow peril incarnate in one man.*" With this kind of source material, one has to say that Christopher Lee's embodiment of the 'yellow peril' is restrained, even tasteful. He doesn't put on a 'velly solly' cod-Oriental accent, nor do Franco and Towers give him diatribes about the destruction of the West; as envisaged here, Fu Manchu is basically a lone maniac lusting for cartoonish personal power. As such he is the first of Franco's 'deracinated' monsters, by which I mean that he is isolated and removed from his prior context (later examples would include the eponymous monsters and villains in *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein*, *La venganza del doctor Mabuse*, and *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein*). You could in fact argue that what's wrong with Franco's version of Fu Manchu is that having scooped away the paranoid racism of Rohmer's narrative, he neglects to put anything substantial in its place. On the other hand, his version of the character could be considered postmodern; he floats in an absurd universe of antiquated vendettas, of threats without significance. He seeks vengeance but offers no controlling narrative; he lusts for global power but without a political context. Even his race, once so important to the fearful fantasy of Rohmer's text, is now insubstantial. He's a cartoon 'Chinaman' roaming the planet, plotting random nonsense in whichever corner of the globe currently signifies exoticism to a Western audience – somewhere in South America in *The Blood of Fu Manchu*, or Barcelona masquerading as Turkey in *The Castle of Fu Manchu*. Franco's Fu Manchu is like a coin worn too smooth to make a purchase, a simulation of threatening otherness stripped of any meaning, racist or otherwise, and left to fend for himself: a brand name without a

company. No wonder his voice, as it issues his famous catchphrase, sounds so unusually weak for a villainous mastermind...

**Franco on screen:** Franco is seen for a brief few seconds as one of Sancho López's men attacking a woman behind a heavy metal gate.

**Cast and crew:** A number of Franco firsts here, most notably of course the presence of Christopher Lee, who appeared in a grand total of six Franco films between 1968 and 1988 ... Then there's Maria Röhm, soon-to-be veteran of four Franco films, all of them Harry Alan Towers productions by virtue of her being Towers's girlfriend ... Ricardo Palacio returns for the second of seven Franco roles: he would go on to appear in five of his ultra-low-budget 1980s films, including the frankly awful *La furia en el trópico*, the rather wonderful *Fuego sucio en Casablanca* and the unreleased AIDS shocker *Sida, le peste del siglo XX* ... Richard Greene took over the Nayland Smith role from Douglas Wilmer, star of the two previous films in the series (1966's *The Brides of Fu Manchu* and 1967's *The Vengeance of Fu Manchu*). Greene was TV's most prolific Robin Hood, having played the part in 143 episodes between 1955 and 1960 (five of which, you may be surprised to learn, were directed by Lindsay Anderson). He also starred in Nathan Juran's curious semi-Gothic *The Black Castle* (1952), but by the late 1960s he'd basically had enough of the film industry. Apart from his two outings for Franco (he's in *The Castle of Fu Manchu* as well), his most notable later role came in the 'Wish You Were Here' segment of the much loved Amicus anthology *Tales from the Crypt* (1972) ... Götz George (yes, the name's the right way round) plays the dashing hero Carl Jansen, a role previously essayed by Joachim Fuchsberger in *The Face of Fu Manchu* (1965). He's quite a catch, every inch the impressive young hero with his piercing grey eyes and athletic demeanour. A major asset to the production, he was already a huge star in Germany. He'd garnered immediate praise for an early role alongside Romy Schneider as the sixteen year old lover of an older woman in *Jacqueline* (1959), played a boxer turned criminal mixed up in sinister goings on in Eugenio Martín's 'creepy dummy' tale *Hypnosis* (1962), and featured in *Wartezimmer zum Jenseits* (aka *Mark of the Tortoise*) (1965) a krimi directed by Alfred Vohrer and co-starring Klaus Kinski. He has since maintained a respected career in Germany, often in challenging and controversial roles, receiving much acclaim for his role as serial killer Fritz Haarmann in the sober but powerful *Der Totmacher* (1995) and Josef Mengele in Roland Suso Richter's *Nichts als die Wahrheit* (1999) ... Fu Manchu's daughter Lin Tang is played by Chinese actor Tsai Chin, famed for her London stage appearance in *The World of Suzie Wong* and a fleeting but memorable turn as a seductress trying to kill Sean Connery's James Bond in *You Only Live Twice* (1966). An associate member of RADA, she went on to a busy career on the British and American stage, before turning up in her second Bond film, *Casino Royale* (2006). In her 1988 autobiography *Daughter of Shanghai* she stated that whilst making the Fu Manchu films she felt useless, being required only to sneer and look evil.

**Music:** The lively, elegant orchestral score, with shades of orientalism which thankfully avoid excessive cliché, is a testament to the composer's versatility... whoever he is. On the English print the music is credited to Daniel White; the Spanish print credits prolific German composer Gert Wilden.

**Locations:** We're supposed to be somewhere between the Andes and the Matto Grosso, making the location of Fu Manchu's lair either Bolivia or Paraguay. Exterior filming in fact took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, at Furnas de Agassiz in the Tijuca Forest. We're obviously in some sort of nature reserve, with tidily arranged paths and trees and discretely designed log bridges, a long way from the untamed jungle. The name 'Pedra da Onça' is written on a restaurant sign, which is a small town in the middle of Brazil, quite a long way from Rio de Janeiro, but this of course is no guarantee that the production ventured so far inland and may just be a coastal café with a provincial name. Further shooting, including interiors, took place in Madrid, Barcelona and Alicante.

**UK theatrical release:** *The Blood of Fu Manchu* received Jess Franco's first British 'A' certificate, clearing it for family audiences. However the film was cut: see Appendix for details.

**Connections:** Fu Manchu was the subject of thirteen novels by Sax Rohmer, beginning in 1913 with *The Mystery of Dr. Fu Manchu* and ending with *Emperor Fu Manchu* in 1959. The wicked Oriental mastermind swiftly proved a popular subject for screen adaptation, beginning with a 24-part silent movie serial (1923-1924) by the prolific A.E. Coleby (director of 242 silent shorts in 22 years) and Fred Paul (85 silent shorts in sixteen years) drawing on the text of the first three Fu Manchu novels. Five years later, in the USA, the character was revived for three Paramount talkies, *The Mysterious Dr. Fu Manchu* (Rowland V. Lee, 1929), *The Return of Dr. Fu Manchu* (Rowland V. Lee, 1931) and *Daughter of the Dragon* (Lloyd Corrigan, 1931). In these, Fu Manchu was played by Warner Oland, who decamped from Paramount to Fox soon afterwards for a run of sixteen films playing Oriental sleuth Charlie Chan. Next came MGM's *The Mask of Fu Manchu* (Charles Brabin, 1932) starring Boris Karloff, probably the best known (and most controversial) of these early titles. *Drums of Fu Manchu*, a serial adventure released in 1940 by Republic Pictures (and edited into a feature film in 1943) and an obscure Spanish comedy called *El otro Fu-Man-Chú* (Ramón Barreiro, 1942) followed, after which the Oriental nemesis moved to American television, with the 13-episode serial *The Adventures of Dr. Fu Manchu* (note the change of emphasis in the title, which makes Fu Manchu sound like a hero not a villain!).

That was it until the mid-1960s, when Harry Alan Towers persuaded Christopher Lee to tackle the role in *The Face of Fu Manchu* (Don Sharp, 1965). A decent commercial success, it was swiftly followed by *The Brides of Fu Manchu* (Sharp again, 1966), *The Vengeance of Fu Manchu* (Jeremy Summers, 1967), and finally the two Jess Franco films, *The Blood of Fu Manchu* (1967) and *The Castle of Fu Manchu* (1968). Nayland Smith returns to his ersatz Sherlock Holmes role after indulging in the James Bond heroics



of *The Face of Fu Manchu*; when Dr. Petrie arrives at the Smith residence, Smith plucks a blonde hair from his visitor's lapel and remarks on him having enjoyed recent female company; "and a dyed blonde at that" ... Footage of Shirley Eaton turns up that was also used in Franco's next film *La ciudad sin nombres*: "Everlasting death. Horrible, inescapable universal death!" she promises, playing a character called 'The Black Widow' – presumably one of Fu Manchu's trusted agents abroad. Eaton is credited on German prints but not on the English-language or Spanish versions of the film (German sources give Eaton's character name as 'Li Hong'). Some have criticised Franco for using footage 'interchangeably', but actually it fits reasonably well, and the dubbing is so accurate I can't help wondering if he shot it for *Blood of Fu Manchu* first: after all, the duplicated footage doesn't feature in the English-language version of *The Girl from Rio*, only in the Spanish edition released two years later. The fact of the matter is that the Towers productions overlap so much there's really no point complaining if bits of one turn up in another. Without a detailed diary kept by one of the participants we may never know in what sequence certain scenes were shot.

**Other versions:** According to Lucas Balbo there were no less than three different edits of this film available on American video. A German video release provided a fourth version, with a little more semi-nudity and violence. Balbo also points out that a production still shows a bare-breasted Maria Röhm, hands tied above her head, being menaced with a snake by one of Fu Manchu's minions. This scene is apparently missing from all the video versions mentioned so far, and it's likewise missing from the DVD release by Blue Underground, in which Röhm's breasts remain covered throughout. However, stills of a semi-nude Röhm being terrorised by a snake-wielding guard are included on the DVD extras, confirming Balbo's discovery and suggesting there's a saucier version still out there somewhere. Other scenes present in the German version but missing or truncated in the American videos, such as the erotic dance performed by one of Fu Manchu's deadly seductresses, the snake biting the bare breasts of another female prisoner, and the chaining and whipping of female captives at the start of the film, are included in the BU DVD version, so it seems that only the Röhm material is now missing.

**Problematica:** The American Film Institute Catalogue 1960-1969 contains the following credits - presumably in error: production manager: Francisco Romero. co-art director: Augusto Lega. music: Hans-Martin Majewski. It also mistakenly credits Vicente Roca as 'Vicente Sejournant'. *Obsession* adds the following unconfirmed credit: co-screenplay: Ricardo Franco (presumably Franco's brother Ricardo, a doctor, who may have offered ideas to do with the effects of snake venom?).

**Press coverage:** *ABC Madrid* commented favourably, "Fu Manchu comes back in another series of combative episodes and, to demonstrate that he is up to date on cinema trends, his evil deeds are now tinted with eroticism. A series of splendid women appear in

his new machinations, as beautiful as they are dangerous, who cause no less than death with their lips. Kisses that kill do exist, and that is reliably demonstrated here. Spectacular action, violence, intrigue, photography tricks... Fu Manchu's world, whose new adventures are being played by expert actors, like Christopher Lee, Götz George and Richard Greene, along with an ensemble of beautiful killers."<sup>2</sup> *La Vanguardia* were also reasonably happy, commenting, "Fu Manchu is one of the longest-lived cinematographic characters. Invented almost forty years ago, he continues to appear on the screen in successive reincarnations. Bringing him back to life this time is Jesús Franco, one of our directors who works mostly abroad. After having directed in Germany and America, he now does it in London for this movie. [Fu Manchu] is one of those who practice evil like a sport or a religion, and the destruction of human beings like a rite. This time he puts in motion a new process [...] A group of beautiful girls is prepared so as to produce death each time they kiss an admirer [...] Jesús Franco has achieved a very acceptable film within the obligatory norms of the terrifying and fantastic genre."<sup>3</sup>

## THE GIRL FROM RIO

Spain, West Germany, USA & UK 1968

Spanish depósito legal number: M-14942-1970

*Original theatrical title in country of origin*

**La ciudad sin hombres** (SP theatrical)

**Die sieben Männer der Sumuru** (GER theatrical)

**Mothers of America** (USA theatrical)

*Alternative titles*

**Sumuru Regina di femina** (IT theatrical)

**A Mulher do Rio** (Brazilian theatrical) *The River Woman*

**Future Women** (US television)

**A Garota do Rio** (POR DVD) *The River Girl*

**Rio 70** (shooting title; possibly export title)

*Production companies*

**Ada Films** (Madrid)

**Terra-Filmkunst GmbH** (Berlin)

**Udastex Films, Inc.** (New York/London)

© 1968. **Terra-Filmkunst** (Berlin) [GER prints]

© 1968. **Udastex Films, Ltd** (London) [English-language prints]

*Theatrical distributors*

**DICINSA** [Distribuidora Cinematográfica Internacional, S.A.] (Madrid)

**Constantin-Film** (Munich)

**Gerald Fine - Fine Products** (Los Angeles)

*Timeline*

Shooting date	February	1968
West Germany premiere	14 March	1969
Italy (Ivrea)	06 April	1970
Barcelona	20 March	1972
Seville	15 July	1972
Madrid	05 February	1973

*Theatrical running time*

Spain	79m
West Germany	79m

**Cast:** **Shirley Eaton** ('Sumuru', called Sunanda). **Richard Wyler** (Jeff Suttin [sic]). **George Sanders** (Sir Masius). **Maria Röhm** (Lesley Manners, manicurist). **Marta Reves** (Ulla Rossini, kidnapped young woman). **Elisa Montés** (Irene, Sir Masius' girlfriend). **Beni Cardoso** (Yana, Sumuru's second-in-command). **Herbert Fleischmann** (Carl, Sir Masius' assistant). **Walter Rilla** (Ennio Rossini, bank manager). *uncredited:* **Valentina Godoy** (sentry no.10). **Fernando Reski** (Jeff's hairdresser). **Jess Franco** (guitar player on promenade). **Rafael de la Rosa** (Domingo, ex-president). **Edson Freitas Silva** (Yana's doomed lover). **Elídio Nunes**. **Brunildes Fernandes Queiroz**. **Oswaldo Mattesco**. **Maria de Lourdes**. **Yuma Duarte**. **Décio Leite Leal**. **Paulo Leitão**. **Alberto Batista de Castro Land**. **Geraldo José Torres Camargo**. **Roberval José Rocha**. **Cornélio dos Santos Farias**.

**Credits:** directed by **Jess Franco**. screenplay: **Harry Alan Towers** [as 'Peter Welbeck'] / **Franz Eichhorn** [SP prints add] / **Karl Leder** [GER prints add]; based on characters created by **Sax Rohmer**. director of photography: **Manuel Merino**. editors: **Alan [Allan] Morrison** [German/English-language prints] / **Ángel Serrano** [SP prints] / **Karin Vietinghoff** [GER prints add]. art director: **Peter Manhardt**. music: **Daniel White**. producer: **Harry Alan Towers**. executive producer: **Tibor Reves**. production coordinator: **Juan Estelrich**. production managers: **Robert [Roberto] Bakker**, **Bruno Leder**. assistant directors: **Reynald P. Barros** [SP prints] / **Ricardo Franco** [English-language prints]. continuity: **Carmen Salas**. camera operator: **Javier Pérez Zofio**. make-up: **Stewart [Stuart] Freeborn**, **Manolita García Fraile**. set dressing & property master: **Jaime Rubio**. laboratories: **Fotofilm Madrid, S.A.**; **Geyer Werke**. sound: **Paul Schöler** [GER prints]. sound re-recording: **Arcofón, S.A.**. dubbing editor: **Adrian MacDonald**. dialogue director: **Manfred R. Köhler** [GER prints].

**Synopsis:** *Jeff Suttin flies to Rio from the USA, having apparently stolen \$10 million. Arriving at a hotel, he seduces a beautiful manicurist called Lesley. His audacious theft has attracted the attention of one of Rio's leading gangsters, Sir Masius, who sends his lackeys to abduct Jeff and Lesley. They fail due to Jeff's fighting skills. When a newspaper*

*pushed under Lesley's hotel-room door reveals that Jeff is wanted for theft, she proposes that perhaps the two of them should fly away somewhere safer. Jeff agrees. However, Lesley is separated from Jeff at the airport, apparently abducted. Jeff boards a plane without her and is promptly drugged by the stewardess. When he comes round, he finds himself in a city called Femina, on a small island unknown to the world at large. It's populated entirely by women and ruled by a tyrannical female called Sunanda. Rich businessmen are lured to the island by Femina agents, only to find themselves imprisoned, drugged, tortured and stripped of their assets. Jeff is placed in a glass cage along with a variety of other unfortunates, including Ulla, daughter of a wealthy businessman. Jeff reveals to Ulla that he's not really a criminal; he's a secret agent hired by her father. When Sunanda discovers Jeff's deceit she plans special tortures for him. However, one of the guards feels sorry for the pair and unlocks their cell. Jeff and Ulla escape back to Rio, where Jeff is captured by Sir Masius. Dismayed to learn that the money was simply a ruse, he forces Jeff to lead a raiding party to steal Sunanda's gold, but Sunanda is waiting. Rather than give in she opts for total annihilation of the island.*

**Production notes:** Hot on the heels of *The Blood of Fu Manchu* came *The Girl from Rio*, shot in February 1968, a sci-fi fantasy adventure about a female villain determined to eradicate men from the world. Although the film appears not to have been released in Great Britain, Anglo Amalgamated Film Distributors (who released a number of Towers' films in the UK) obviously planned to do so, going so far as to generate poster artwork in readiness.

**Review:** *The Girl from Rio* is a silly, often confusing film which sets up a potentially exciting conflict – a literal 'war of the sexes' – that it never adequately explores. It's populated by characters as dull as old bathwater, and relationships as flimsy as bargain basement tissue. However, it often looks quite ravishing, considering its budget, with lovely locations, imaginative set design and some clever photography. The script and characterisations are weak, the story is a mess, and the performances fail to ignite; fortunately the cinematography, the art design, and a parade of beautiful women in unusual fetish-wear redeem the film, if only on a visual level.

The English language version begins promisingly, with a mysterious woman making love to a naked male, apparently in some sort of cage, although the 'bars' are revealed, thanks to Franco's focus-pulling camerawork, to be made of the same chain-mesh fabric as the woman's revealing gown. In one simple image, Franco suggests that the bonds that tie men in 'slavery' to women are created by their own hand; after all, is it not mostly men who pay for and design the bewitching clothes that women use to ensnare their 'prey'? As this unidentified male lies supine and submissive, dry ice wafts around and one wonders if this is another of Franco's staged sex show scenes (see *Succubus* or *The Diabolical Dr. Z*). A second woman enters the frame and plants her foot on the man's throat, before scratching his face with her fingernails. Meanwhile, the anti-heroine of the film looks on approvingly...



Unfortunately the excitement is then squashed during a dull credit sequence showing a plane coming in to land, very s-l-o-w-l-y (I suppose in 1968 international air travel still looked exotic and enticing but that doesn't excuse the feeble editing). We're introduced first of all to the male villain, Masius, an urbane fellow played by George Sanders, who we learn is the sort to have you executed if you're unwise enough to beat him at chess. Next we encounter Jeff Suttan, played by Richard Wyler, just arrived in Rio with a suitcase full of cash. Franco immediately makes fun of Suttan's male vanity: his first significant scene involves him receiving that most prissy of male grooming practises, a manicure. Obviously, the film teases, such matters are as vital to this 'rugged' individual as they are to the ladies he will soon encounter. (See 'Other versions' for a different take on the character.) Later we observe him smooching in his boudoir with the manicurist, wearing an embroidered shirt that Liberace might have thought a little 'dressy'. We're clearly not intended to like this would-be smoothie; as he cosies up to the woman with whom he's spent the night partying (and fighting off a gangland murder attempt), he asks, "*Oh I forgot something - what is your name?*" So, not much of a charmer then. Opting to go on the run with her - she's called Lesley, by the way - he allows himself to be guided onto a plane by a gun-toting woman dressed in a bizarre plastic fetish outfit. 'Is this *really* the norm for Brazilian Airways?', we wonder. However all is not as it seems; Suttan is deliberately allowing himself to be abducted, for reasons the plot will divulge later. The scene that follows is worthy of *The Avengers* at its psychedelic best: Suttan is gassed with an emergency airbag by the female flight attendant, and as he sits in his seat, doped to the eyeballs, he looks bleakly around the cabin at the other passengers, all of them women. Dressed in the same sci-fi fetish outfits as the 'hostess', they stare coldly back as he goes under.

The film's deadly villainess, called Sunanda in the dialogue (neither Sumuru, as in the Sax Rohmer source book, nor Sumitra, as the end credits insist), is played by Shirley Eaton, iconic female star of *Goldfinger*, but there ain't much sparkle here. In Sax Rohmer's *The Sins of Sumuru* the arch villainess is described as "*possessing the arts of Circe and the allurements of Calypso, the brains of Winston Churchill and the soul of a Himmler.*"<sup>1</sup> Eaton, on the other hand, manages the arts and allurements of a bored suburban dominatrix on her day off. Alternating without explanation between dark hair and an unflattering blonde wig, she's a curiously anonymous creature who seems one minute in her late twenties, the next in her early forties. As she glares with what's supposed to be erotic amusement at the plight of her male prisoners she seems to drift off, before remembering she's being offered money for old rope, at which thought the mildest of smirks returns. In a 2004 interview she declared that after making *The Girl from Rio* she decided she'd had enough of making movies<sup>2</sup>; watching the film you'd swear you can see her reach that decision as the camera turns.

Now to weightier matters: namely feminism, as envisaged by the erotomaniacal Jess Franco and that eminent defender of

women's rights, Harry Alan Towers. I must say it doesn't seem much fun, being a woman on the island of Femina. Waging war against men appears to involve imitating the worst excesses of the North Korean military while dressed like an S&M prostitute. The girls stand in rigid formation holding guns all day, with the wind blowing around their exposed parts, while the Mistress Sumatra (or Sumola, or whatever the hell she's called) swans around, showing off the architecture to visiting males. Speaking of which (males, not architecture), Richard Wyler's failure to generate a single spark of sexiness in the role of jeopardised hunk dooms the film to also-ran status as surely as the low budget, dopey script or poorly edited action scenes. Wyler, a British-born actor whose signature role in the UK was a long-forgotten TV series *The Man from Interpol* (1959), ought to have carried the viewer into the wicked world of Femina with both an eye on his sexual prowess and an awareness of his vulnerability amidst a horde of dangerous man-eaters. Instead he's just boring, conveying none of the suavity or swagger required to make him a viable challenge to Eaton's dominatrix. When he escapes, and she vows to recapture him, you wonder why she bothers. Just let him go, you find yourself thinking, and heed the wise words of Mae West: "It's not the men in your life; it's the life in your men!"

The central notion of a 'city of women' preparing to overthrow masculine dominance and take over the world is yet another riff on the old 'planet of women' story that so obsessed sci-fi specialists in the 1960s and 1970s. (I'm sure Irwin Allen or Gene Roddenberry would have been happy to rewrite this as a TV pilot a few years later, probably starring John Saxon.) However, feminists will find little to cheer about, because in deference to Sax Rohmer's novels the conquering force of womankind is portrayed as essentially fascistic: "*If one of my girls isn't perfect, she must die!*" sneers Sumantra (or Sarathustra, or whatever the hell she's called). The film's vision of an alternative matriarchal society is all whips and corsets; from the point of view of gender politics the film is at best farcical, at worst insulting to women. The story offers male viewers a lukewarm sip of female domination fantasy and a cool refreshing pint of masculine moral righteousness, as this matriarchy is shown to lack a shred of decency in dealing with its own. Woman, it seems, may be allowed a few coquettish teases, and the right to wear kinky outfits, but once she's been for a run around the block in her dominatrix gear she can be shoved back in her place because she's just not ready to rule.

Despite being a story about a 'strong woman', *The Girl from Rio* has nothing useful to say about feminism: that's because its real subject is male masochism. "*How far can they go, the women who hate men?*" pants the advertising for the film's Spanish release as *La ciudad sin hombres* ('City without Men'). It's worth remembering that the tag of 'man-hater' was a common criticism levelled at feminists in the 'second wave' of women's liberation in the 1960s, but the script here can't be bothered to ask *why* a woman might hate a man. The 'war of the sexes' remains an abstraction.



*Clockwise from top left: Sunanda (Shirley Eaton, left) at the Carnival with Lesley (Maria Röhm) ... Yana (Beni Cardoso) bestrides Jeff (Richard Wyler) while Valentina Godoy (Sentry No.10, middle) looks on ... "You'll get more than your nails cut if you come any closer" quips manicurist Lesley ... Lesley, in carnival costume, knocks out Carl (Herbert Fleischmann), Masius's aide ... Jeff saves the day, joined by (l to r) Lesley, Irene (Elisa Montés) and Ulla (Marta Reves).*

Three authors are at work in *The Girl from Rio*, Jess Franco, Sax Rohmer and Harry Alan Towers: what unites them is the pleasure of seeing powerful women as sexual fantasy-figures, but it's equally important to stress how their attitudes differ. The film portrays Sunanda as simultaneously desirable, frightening and contemptible, so can we delineate and separate out the authors of these conflicting messages? I think we can. Franco, as his work has proven again and again, loves women. He adores them. From him we get the element of desire, along with misandry, the conviction that men are inferior. Franco expressed on numerous occasions, and reiterated to me personally, his feeling that women are superior to men, but, in *The Girl from Rio* at least, that superiority is merely a projection of male masochism and has precious little to do with women themselves. From Rohmer we get the *fear* of strong women. Rohmer wrote his Sumuru stories immediately after the Second World War, and it's often pointed out by historians that the women's movement was boosted by the war effort. Women 'manned' the factories making weaponry (a role forbidden them during the First World War), acted as searchlight operators, played a major role in codebreaking, and joined units like the Women's Auxiliary Fire Service and the Women's Auxiliary Police Corps. In this climate of increased female prominence, Rohmer's decision to create a female supervillain intent on ruling the world looks very much like a nervous response to the social changes of his day. A common reactionary tactic when a group challenges social inequity is to imply that equality is 'not enough for them', hence the notion of women ruling the world and subjugating men. Again, the Second World War provides a context for the narrative Rohmer dreamed up. Female emancipation in the Sumuru stories goes beyond a striving for equality; instead, Sumuru's goal is to establish a Nazi-inspired new world order, with herself as divine ruler. Men without useful skills or pleasing physical attributes are to be eradicated. Her vision involves eugenics and state-sanctioned murder: "Only those with great physical beauty, and/or great brains, would survive. They would be mated with her selected women and so produce a perfect race," the hero explains in *The Slaves of Sumuru* (1951).<sup>3</sup> Rohmer's villainess is thus a response to both the Nazi menace and female independence, mixed together with a swooning enjoyment of the erotics of it all.

For different reasons, neither Sax Rohmer's Sumuru nor Franco's Sunanda seek equality; they both regard men as inferior. However, *The Girl from Rio*'s vision of powerful women is warped and refracted through a diametrically opposed streak of male chauvinism. One suspects that it comes from the film's writer and producer Harry Alan Towers, which would explain why the film is so peculiarly unsuccessful; it's pulling in two completely incompatible directions. From Towers we get an insidious *undermining* of strong women. The story patronises them, exaggerates them, makes them act foolishly. The inherent silliness of the film emanates from the script which, for instance, has Sunanda unable to defend her gold bullion against an attack by three men, one of them the elderly

George Sanders, by any means except blowing up the entire city of Femina. It looks suspiciously as though Sunanda is being set up; Towers is deliberately undermining her credibility. Showing off her pride and joy, a glass room full of gold, she informs Jeff: "If any man should reach this point, the whole city will explode in a thousand pieces." Quite apart from the dubious wisdom of giving a man this information, you have to wonder why the villainess feels the need to hit the self-destruct button quite so easily. Couldn't she simply rig up a death ray to fry the thief's testicles? Surely that would be a more suitable means of dealing with intruders? One is tempted to laugh at Sunanda's ineptitude, but it's really not her fault; such nonsense has all the hallmarks of Towers's scripting style. The fortress of Femina may as well have a big red button in the middle marked 'Press here to stop the plot'. (Credit where credit's due though: Towers did write Jeff's line, "What kind of a space-age sorceress are you?", which is almost worth the price of admission on its own.) An emphasis on money is another feature of the script: Sunanda says, "Men have their uses. They helped us to build this city, with their labor and above all their money." This sounds very much like the voice of the self-made man who feels that all women want is to get their hands on his cash. "When somebody has something of value, I want it" says Sunanda to Jeff, wrapping her legs around him while discussing his stolen millions. "You sound just like all the girls I ever met," Jeff replies – and when Sunanda pouts, "You don't think I'm different?" Jeff embraces her with the words, "Prove it." The scene then cuts, with Jeff very much on top. One has to wonder if Towers's heart is really in this 'fem-dom' fantasy; he seems more excited by the prospect of settling scores with women than worshipping them.

*The Girl from Rio* may touch on one of the bigger issues of its day, but it's too shaky and superficial to warrant further analysis. Its charms, such as they are, are entirely a matter of visual style. There's some lovely photography courtesy of Manuel Merino, for instance when Sunanda (or Samantha, or whatever the hell she's called) walks with Jeff through the 'city of women'. Franco hangs the camera nice and low, framing the characters dramatically against angular modernist ceilings to wring maximum impact from the imposing architecture. In one amazing shot, Sunanda and Jeff walk through an entrance hall lined ceiling to floor with enormous slanted windows, and Franco, with his camera positioned outside, lines up the reflections in such a way that the figures seem to move impossibly, like ghosts, through solid objects. Also impressive is the scene in which Jeff and Lesley take a walk along an apparently deserted promenade, only to find themselves menaced at knifepoint by thugs wearing joke-shop horror masks. It's a well-structured scene with an unsettling quality missing from the rest of the film. Masius's henchmen driving a fantastically ornate Brazilian hearse adds a welcome touch of the baroque, and Jeff's escape with Ulla, the woman he's entered Femina to rescue, is also a delight, with dry-ice gushing from air vents in the floor, creating whirls of smoky abstraction.



Putting aside the fact that this was a rushed, indeed botched production, the problem with *The Girl from Rio* is simply that it lacks the liberating explicitness that provides its own justification in Franco's later cinema. The sexual provocation is too mild to titillate, much less stir up the erotics of male anxiety. And while the sets and bizarre costumes are fun (you can tell it's the late Sixties; there's plastic absolutely everywhere), this time Franco is unable to synthesise a compelling fantasy from the constituent parts.

**Franco on screen:** Franco is seen briefly, playing guitar on the promenade as Wyler and Röhm are attacked.

**Cast and crew:** The only intriguing character in *The Girl from Rio* is Masius, played by veteran British character actor George Sanders. His urbane, comedically squeamish, comic-book reading crime boss is a comprehensible, intelligent villain with believable eccentricities, performed with élan by a quality actor. Of course we know that Sanders committed suicide a couple of years later, in 1972, leaving a suicide note that read: "Dear World, I am leaving because I am bored. I feel I have lived long enough. I am leaving you with your worries in this sweet cesspool. Good luck."<sup>24</sup> Fortunately, with Sanders completing seven more feature films after completion of *The Girl from Rio*, one cannot really implicate Franco directly (see *Press Coverage*) ... Making the first of six appearances for Franco is actress Beni Cardoso, playing Sunanda's lesbian assistant Yana. The lesbian angle, according to Shirley Eaton, was added after she left the production. Indeed it's obvious, in the scene where Sunanda and Yana get down to some discreet canoodling, that it's not Eaton in the scene but another woman facing away from the camera, wearing a blonde wig about twice as long as Eaton's! Cardoso is always a welcome presence in Franco's movies; she has an interesting, bony face, a sort of South American Liza Minnelli, and she can convey both cruelty and her own eccentric brand of warmth. Though one of the least celebrated of Franco's regular female performers, she's a gifted actress when given a decent role. **Music:** Slathered in samba-inflected muzak, *The Girl from Rio* is sabotaged even by its Daniel White soundtrack, violating the last refuge for Franco-watchers: his impeccable taste in music usually pulls you through. Only the title track has charm, thanks to its amusing femme-fatale lyric and seductive melody. The entirely different title theme for the German and Spanish versions sounds somewhat old-fashioned as though it were lifted from a TV cop series of the 1950s.

**Locations:** Chiefly the seafront hotels of Rio de Janeiro, the Museum of Modern Art in Rio De Janeiro and the city's Galeão-Antonio Carlos Jobim International Airport.

**Connections:** *The Girl from Rio* was conceived by Harry Alan Towers as a sequel to his earlier production *The Million Eyes of Sumuru* (1967), directed by Lindsay Shonteff and starring Eaton alongside Klaus Kinski and Frankie Avalon ... 'Sumuru' was the female villain in a series of five pulp novels by Sax Rohmer: *The Sins of Sumuru* aka *Nude in Mink* (1950), *Sumuru* aka *The Slaves of Sumuru* (1951), *The Fire Goddess* aka *Virgin in Flames* (1952),

*Return of Sumuru* aka *Sand and Satin* (1954), and the wonderfully titled *Sinister Madonna* (1958). As Rohmer scholars Briney and Lofts explained in their publication *The Rohmer Review* (No.15, 1976), the character was first aired in 1945, in a BBC Radio serial of eight half-hour episodes called *Shadow of Sumuru*. At the time, the BBC were loath to commission Rohmer's Fu Manchu character out of concern for the offence it might cause Britain's Chinese allies, so the writer simply rejigged the Fu Manchu set-up by substituting a female villain of indeterminate nationality (note that for the poster for the 1967 Shonteff film adds a hyphen, turning Sumuru into 'Su-Muru' perhaps to emphasise similarity to Fu Manchu) ... The idea of an organised cabal of women plotting to overthrow patriarchal society is ported over from Franco's recent *Kiss Me Monster*, in which Marta Reves played the Shirley Eaton role ... Franco would revisit similar themes in a much more sexually provocative vein in 1977's *Blue Rita*, shot under the watchful eye of Swiss producer Erwin C. Dietrich ... A matriarchal society would also be depicted in the daft but quixotically amusing *Maciste contre la reine des Amazones* (1973) ... The glass cages in which prisoners wriggle in torment reappear in Franco's slight but enjoyable *Linda* (1981) ... Jess was evidently rather taken with the Great Train Robbery of 1963; following a quip on the subject from Rosanna Yanni in *Sadisterotica*, here we encounter a certain 'Westlake' (evidently modelled on the notorious gang-member and escapee Ronnie Biggs) who has been relieved of his ill-gotten gains and enslaved on Femina. At the time this was made, Ronnie Biggs was still domiciled in Rio, avoiding extradition to Great Britain; if Franco had persuaded Biggs himself to play the part he could have trumped the Sex Pistols' manager Malcolm McLaren and filmmaker Julien Temple, who pulled the stunt ten years later in *The Great Rock'n'Roll Swindle*!

**Other versions:** Comparing the English-language version *The Girl from Rio* with the German edition *Die sieben Männer der Sumuru*, the differences come thick and fast. Both begin with a pre-credit sequence featuring Beni Cardoso in a see-through gown tormenting a prone male, but whereas *The Girl from Rio* then runs the credits over dull travelogue footage, *Die sieben Männer der Sumuru* goes for a still of Eaton's face, with trippy photographic effects and a different theme tune. After a brief scene of Sumuru giving a motivational speech to her minions on Femina, the German print introduces a totally new plot strand, more than seven minutes in all, beginning with Jeff Suttin visiting the offices of a banker called Ennio Rossini, whose daughter has been abducted by Sumuru in order to extort money. While flirting with the old man's secretary, Bond-style, Jeff agrees to take on the challenge of tracking down the missing girl. We see her photo and recognise her as a prisoner in Sumuru's hi-tech dungeon. There follows an impressive action sequence in which Jeff carries out a daring heist to attract the attention of the money-mad Sumuru, stealing ten million dollars from a bank deposit van before fleeing to Rio. Jeff's cunning plan, barely comprehensible in *The Girl from Rio*, is

thus far clearer in *Die sieben Männer der Sumuru*; he intends to get himself abducted in order to retrieve the missing girl and bring down Sumuru. After a new establishing shot of Rio de Janeiro, panning from the Statue of Christ the Redeemer across the bay to Sugarloaf Mountain, *Die sieben Männer der Sumuru* reconverges with *The Girl from Rio*, with Jeff checking into a hotel observed by Masius's gang. Note that in the German version Jeff comes across as far more macho, pulling off an armed robbery *before* we see him being manicured! After that, the differences are slight: for instance, Jeff's 'torture' (being passionately kissed by two women and trampled by a topless woman in high heels) is accompanied in the German cut by rhythmic percussion music, giving the scene a lot more erotic dynamism; in the English language variant this music is missing, leaving simply a few groans and faint electronic sounds in the background.

*Die sieben Männer der Sumuru* provides the template for the later Spanish cut, *La ciudad sin hombres*, released in 1972. (The English newspaper alerting Lesley that Jeff is a bank robber has the relevant headline printed in German, which suggests the Spanish version was made from the German film elements.) Unsurprisingly, *La ciudad sin hombres* removes the sexy opening scene: a little too kinky for Spain. Instead, a caption roll fills us in on the history of the mysterious Sumuru, who is named as such throughout the film. She's a female super-criminal bent on the destruction of man, first spotted in Germany in 1920, who disappeared in 1922 after a fierce battle with police in the Black Forest region. It is said she must have discovered the secret of eternal youth, as she never seems to age. This information is followed by a scene not included in either the German or American versions, in which Sumuru, dressed in black gown and veil, sits at a table with five similarly attired women, declaring her plans for world domination. (Those who have seen *The Blood of Fu Manchu* will recognise this footage). The credits play over a static colour wash, with the same music as the German version, after which the Spanish cut follows the German one closely, beginning with Jeff's meeting with the businessman (called Perez Castaneda this time) and the subsequent heist. After a shortened version of Sumuru's speech to her followers (removing shots of the more fetishistically attired women), *La ciudad sin hombres* runs the title song over moody shots of sunrise on the seafront, with roadsweepers clearing up after the carnival festivities. Small variations like this are used to stand in for missing erotica. The Spanish version removes shots of Röhm's breasts in the hotel bathroom scene and also omits her languid clinch with Jeff on the bed. Jeff's delirious drug experience aboard the plane to Femina is split in two, with the editor being careful to trim any shots in which Beni Cardoso's fetish outfit falls open to reveal her breasts. As one would expect, the more salacious aspects of life on Femina stood no chance with the Spanish censor. Among the missing scenes: nude women using a phallically endowed dressmaker's dummy to practise stimulating a man; a naked woman wriggling in a glass cage; three dominatrices, their breasts

exposed, towering over Jeff as he regains consciousness; a steamy leglock as Sumuru drags Jeff into a kiss; the lesbian clinch between the villainess and her assistant Yana. These excisions are typical of the fate that befell Franco's films in his homeland in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Filling in for all this missing nudity, innocuous intermediate shots are held for longer in *La ciudad sin hombres* than their counterparts in the other versions.

Finally, courtesy of a Greek video release from the 1980s, we have *Future Women*, allegedly an American TV version which is in fact pretty close to the *Girl from Rio* edit (i.e. most of the sexy stuff is there, though none of the important early plot material from the German cut). Although it removes the man's throat being stamped on in the credit sequence, nearly all of the semi-nudity and kinkiness is present, so if this is a TV version it's sexier than you might expect. There are no new scenes, so don't shell out any hard earned dough for it unless you simply have to have everything by Franco, even a pan-and-scanned Greek subtitled video that looks like it's being filmed through an unwashed window. Oh, and if that's not enough to dissuade you, be aware that some dolt has added a droning synthesiser to the soundtrack, sometimes playing just a single note, other times actually mimicking the soundtrack, *out of tune*, over the top. This hellish racket persists over something like two-thirds of the film, presumably to add a 'future feel' to *Future Women*, although the effect is closer to vandalism.

**Problematica:** *Obsession* adds the following unconfirmed credit: co-editor María Luisa Soriano.

**Press coverage:** In Spain there was a mixed response, with *La Vanguardia's* critic unimpressed; "Ciudad sin hombres is an adventure film. In many moments, it seems like those responsible for its production have been inspired by James Bond films. A none-too-shining inspiration when it comes to the results ... It must be said that Jesús Franco [...] has not achieved here the precise rhythm of the action movie. Ciudad sin hombres in many sequences borders on monotony. We see beautiful girls, swimming pools – which suggest, in addition to girls in bikinis, the odd floating corpse – plus punches, escapes, etc. That is to say, just as in the James Bond films. But less so." The critic for *ABC Andalucía* enjoyed the experience rather more, but maintained some reservations: "Jesús Franco has here an uneven production, in which he has particularly cultivated horror, thriller and action elements. Along with a certain craft, though without artistic or technical ambition, his films are also distinguished by their dynamism. On the whole they do not transcend the simply commercial plane of products for popular consumption. Ciudad sin hombres, in which ancient myths are dressed in the conventional trappings of action films, brings together those characteristic features noted in Franco's filmography [...] another escapist product by way of showmanship and violence, this time united with female domination. Women, in fact, have the leading roles in this film, which does not fail to include the usual eroticism. Correct execution and good photography includes splendid exteriors and a dynamic treatment that makes the fantastic story more bearable."<sup>6</sup>

## 99 WOMEN

Spain, West Germany, Italy, UK &amp; USA 1968

Spanish depósito legal number: M-22173-1968

Italian visa number: 53649

Original theatrical title in country of origin

99 mujeres (SP)

Der heisse Tod (GER) *Hot Death*

99 donne (IT)

Alternative titles

Les Brûlantes (FR hardcore theatrical) *The Burning Women*

99 Vrouwen (NL theatrical)

Island of Despair (USTV edit)

99 γυναίκες (Greek video version with extra scenes)

99 Mulheres (POR DVD)

Production companies

Hesperia Films (Madrid)

Corona Filmproduktion (Munich)

Cineproduzioni Associate (Rome)

Towers of London Films, Ltd. (London)

Commonwealth United Productions, Inc. (Los Angeles)

© 1968. Udistex Films, Ltd (London) [English-lang prints]

Theatrical distributors

Paramount Films de España, S.A. (Madrid)

Nora Film (Munich)

Filmar Compagnia Cinematografica (Rome)

Commonwealth United Entertainment, Inc. (Los Angeles)

Cinecenta (London) [club distribution]

Timeline

First shooting period	Feb-March	1968
Second shooting period	June	1968
Screening attended by <i>Variety</i>	31 January	1969
USA premiere (San Francisco)	5 March	1969
West Germany premiere	14 March	1969
Italian visa number 53649 issued	10 April	1969
Rejected by the UK BBFC	11 April	1969
USA (various CA venues)	06 March	1969
Madrid	16 June	1969
Barcelona	09 July	1969
Italy (Rome)	18 July	1969
London (cinema club distribution)	January	1970
Belgium (Brussels)	09 September	1974
French visa 37400 ( <i>Les Brûlantes</i> )	08 November	1974
France (as <i>Les Brûlantes</i> )	27 November	1974

Theatrical running time

Spain	78m
West Germany	108m
Italy	108m
France (as <i>Les Brûlantes</i> )	94m
UK	70m
USA	84m

Cast: **Maria Schell** (Superintendent Leonie Carroll). **Mercedes McCambridge** (Superintendent Thelma Diaz). **Luciana Paluzzi** (Natalie Mendoza, prisoner '98'). **Herbert Lom** (Governor Santos). **Maria Röhm** (Marie, prisoner '99'). **Elisa Montés** (Helga, prisoner '97'). **Rosalba Neri** (Zoe, prisoner '76'). **Valentina Godoy** (Rosalie, prisoner '81'). *uncredited*: **Ana Lucarella** (Marta). **Juan Antonio Riquelme** (Juan Diego, Rosalie's lover). **José Martínez Blanco** (doctor from the Justice Ministry). **Maria Vico** (warden). **Elsa Zabala** (Marta, warden on boat). **Mike Brendel** (Pedro, boatman). **Jess Franco** (2nd man in bowler hat [flashback]/officer on boat [*two roles*]). **María Antonia Redondo** (Grace, Zoe's boss [flashback]).

Credits: director: **Jess Franco**. story: **Jess Franco**. screenplay: **Jess Franco, Carlo Fadda & Milo G. Cuccia**. dialogue: **Any Corvin, Ornella Zanelli** [IT prints]. director of photography: **Manuel Merino**. editors: **Bruno Mattei / María Luisa Soriano** (in Spain) / **Gabrielle Reinecke** (in Germany). art director: **Santiago Ontañón**. music by **Bruno Nicolai**. produced by **Harry Alan Towers**. executive producer: **Luis Laso Moreno**. production managers: **Francisco Romero / Mario Damiani** (in Italy) / **Franz Eichorn** (in Brazil). production secretary: **Loredana Pagliaro** [IT prints]. assistant director: **Juan Estelrich**. camera operator: **Javier Perez Zofio** [SP prints] / **Antonio Modica** [IT prints]. camera assistant: **Riccardo Damiani**. still photography: **Felipe López**. furniture and set dressing: **Jesús Mateos**. make-up: **Adolfo Ponte, Manuela García Fraile**. clothing supplied by **Humberto Cornejo**. filmed in **widescreen**. colour: **Eastmancolor**. laboratory: **Fotofilm-Madrid, S.A.**. sound re-recording: **Arcofón, S.A.**. sound: **Elio Pacella** [IT prints]. *Spanish pressbook adds*: sound engineer: **José Nogueira**. hairstylist: **Antonia Nieto**. *US version* post production supervisor: **Robert S. Eisen**. *uncredited*: the song "*The Day I Was Born*" lyrics by/performed by **Audrey Nohra Stainton**. Spanish producer: **Carlos Couret**. Italian producer: **Alexander Hacohen**.

**Synopsis:** Marie is incarcerated in the Castillo de la Muerte prison, along with Natalie, a junkie forced to go 'cold turkey', and Helga, a hardened cynic. On arrival she is given a prison uniform and a number instead of a name: 99. The prison is run by Superintendent Diaz, a cruel female warden who favours extreme prison discipline. She gloats over the suffering of others, and pimps the girls to Governor Santos, the equally corrupt governor of the neighbouring male prison. The first night, as



Marie lies in her cell, she hears Natalie's moans of pain and realises that she's close to death from drug withdrawal. She calls for help but no one responds. Instead Natalie is left to die, and Marie is punished for 'causing trouble'. Natalie's death arouses the suspicion of a doctor sent to look into the high number of fatalities at the prison. The government responds by sending an inspector, Leonie Carroll, to observe Diaz's methods. Carroll is genuinely concerned for the prisoners and tries to improve their treatment. Marie is raped by her cellmate Zoe while Governor Santos watches avidly. However the two women make friends again, explaining to one another how they came to be in prison: Marie killed a rapist in self-defense yet no one believed her, while Zoe was goaded to murder by the mean treatment of her lesbian boss, Grace. Rosa, a friendly inmate intent on escaping, invites Marie and Zoe to join her. The three succeed in getting out, but thanks to their weakened state of distress, the steamy jungle conditions, some dangerous wildlife, and the unwanted attentions of sex-starved escapees from the nearby male prison, their situation lurches from bad to worse...

**Production notes:** *The Girl from Rio* completed principal photography in Rio de Janeiro in mid-February 1968, a week earlier than expected. This was inconvenient, as a certain amount of material still needed to be shot at the Rio Carnival (during the weekend immediately prior to Ash Wednesday, i.e. 24-26 February 1968). Franco and Towers decided that instead of letting the crew hang around for a week on full pay, they would conceive an entirely new film to make use of the time. Written over a weekend, *99 Women* began shooting on the Monday. In that week fully one-third of it was shot, giving us some idea of the incredible speed at which Franco was working. After the Rio Carnival was over, with the final shots for *The Girl from Rio* in the bag, Franco and his crew flew to Spain to shoot the rest of *99 Women* while already prepping and shooting another film, *Justine*.

**Review:** Well, here we go. Prepare yourselves. Hide your contraband where the sun don't shine, we're about to get banged up. *99 Women* is the first stretch we'll be spending inside the genre that Franco made his own, and like unrepentant career criminals we'll be back many times over the next twenty years. *99 Women* is Franco's first 'women-in-prison' or WIP film, and it marks the beginning of a journey that will take us into the icy cruelty of films like *Frauen-gefängnis* (1975), *Greta - Haus ohne Manner* (1976) and *Frauen für Zellen-Block 9* (1977). Yes, there had been films before set in women's prisons (see 'Connections'), but nothing quite as overheated, salacious and cynical as this. *99 Women*'s sombre tone, alongside a prurient obsession with prison lesbianism and semi-naked women in distress, marks a shift in Franco's sensibility, from the hallucinatory modernism of the Aquila films, to the dark-hued, pain-inflected horrors of the 1970s and beyond. In *Succubus* Franco embraced the sexy, the strange and the poetic; in *99 Women* he turned to sleazy and sadomasochistic pleasures without the velvet of fantasy to soften the edges.

Songbirds in cages. Stuffed birds in glass dioramas. A book on Hitler's rise to power on the desk of the prison Superintendent. The art direction in *99 Women* is nothing if not emphatic. This is a study of the corruption that comes from absolute power, of those in authority who cling to brutality in defiance of all attempts to soften their methods. Mind you, it's also a sexy potboiler about chicks in the slammer, with ripped clothing, catfights, lesbianism, flagellation, rape and lots of emotional trauma thrown in for good measure. So, something for everybody?

A careful reading of Jess Franco's beloved Marquis de Sade reveals a libertarian anarchist in political matters, and a sybaritic libertine in the private sphere of sensuality. Franco's women-in-prison movies bring these two aspects of de Sade into proximity. The only thing they lack is the sustained philosophical debate, so essential to de Sade, that would explore the antagonism. As a result, the women-in-prison films always teeter on an inconsistency: the monsters are the jailers and authority figures, parading around with absolute freedom, exercising wanton cruelty for the sheer hell of it; they are clearly flagged as the villains, and exhibit despicable character traits. Yet Franco the (left-leaning) anarchist, the anti-authoritarian for whom personal freedom is paramount, is also a sensualist, powerfully drawn to sadism: he needs it, he adores it, it feeds and fires his imagination. The cruelty of these despised authority figures feeds the erotic fantasy he craves. Perhaps because he often lacks the patience to write detailed scripts (though let's remember that *99 Women* was written with Harry Alan Towers) Franco never brings these two conflicting aspects into focus. The best he can do, here, is to play a minor heroic character (see 'Other versions') but that really doesn't cut the mustard. Directing a film that drools like a horny schoolboy over the suffering of nude women, then turning up at the end as their saviour, smacks of self-serving fantasy; look, it says, I may be getting off on this but I'm a nice boy really.

Still, never mind all that, what about the sex? What does the horny viewer have to look forward to in *99 Women*? Are there *really* 99 of them? Do they get it on? And how many are whipped, raped or tortured? Well, sorry to say I can count no more than two dozen women, most of them background extras, and the torture tally is a trifle low if you're familiar with the later WIP films. There's a lesbian sexual assault, a flashback to gang rape, some whipping (no close-ups) and copious general bullying and maltreatment of weeping innocents. Not bad for the time it was made.

If that seems a trite and shallow way to touch upon rape in the movies, well, you're right, so let us not speed past it so casually. Franco's burgeoning alliance with Harry Alan Towers, and the changing tenor of the times, liberated him to explore sex and violence directly, and he began to take advantage immediately; rape and pillage occurs in an 'action' context in *The Blood of Fu Manchu* but it's here, in *99 Women*, that rape as the prolonged focus of attention first rears its helmet in a Franco film. It would go on to form one of the lynchpins of his dark erotic cinema of the 1970s

and 1980s, but as we shall see, Franco does not always handle it seriously; it can manifest in a curiously casual, inconsistent way. *99 Women* hinges around a rape scene so wrong-headed and exploitative that we need to address it at length, even at the cost of the remainder of the film, which is far less controversial and a lot more fun. In the scene in question, tough but glamorous Zoe (Rosalba Neri) rapes innocent and vulnerable Marie (Maria Röhm) with the encouragement of Governor Santos (Herbert Lom), a sleazy fascist. Watched by Santos, Zoe sexually assaults Marie, who screams and fights and struggles. Thus far, despite certain camp signifiers, the film has presented what is happening as horrific. However, after a shot of Neri astride Röhm, forcing a kiss and slapping her violently round the face, the camera defocuses and the whole mood changes. Insinuatingly sensual music, lyrical camerawork and the total acquiescence of the victim turn the molestation into, well, a love scene. Yes, ladies and gentlemen, we're dealing with a rape where the victim starts off screaming the place down but ends up getting into it. Just the sort of thing that had feminists of the 1960s and 1970s incandescent with fury; here is what *all* pornography says to men, they argued. A woman may scream and beg not to be raped, but don't be dissuaded; they'll come round eventually. It's hard to deny that rape and molestation have been trivialised here as a form of light-weight 'sexiness', and thus the film relinquishes any claim to intelligence. The horror of sexual assault is thrown aside in favour of softcore titillation. All that's left is idle fantasy of a distinctly adolescent sort; I say adolescent because it lacks the balls to face up to the cruelty it expresses and instead romanticises the unpalatable. This is no Sadean exploration of amorality: we are not privy to the mind-set of a libertine. No, the film presumes for itself the stern foundations of justice versus injustice, right versus wrong, innocence versus guilt. As such its 'morality' is pretentious, and its vision of cruelty is meaningless. Rape is depicted many times in Franco's films from here on, but I can't think of a more irresponsible and foolish treatment than this; like a kid slugging his first moonshine whiskey and then dowsing the horrid taste with sherbet, it takes what is crude and savage and then overwrites it with softcore whimsy.

Another element in need of discussion is the depiction of lesbian sex. Lesbianism had already played a part in *Necronomicon* (in which the heroine makes love to a Sapphic admirer before killing her), *Kiss Me Monster* (in which lesbian separatists plot the overthrow of man) and *The Girl from Rio* (featuring man-hating bisexual Sunanda and her lesbian assistant), but *99 Women* increases the salaciousness quotient considerably in this area. Banged up broads 'forced to go lezzer' – this is the tasty exploitation morsel dangled in front of the audience! Male interest in lesbians is a powerful force in commercial pornography, for which several 'explanations' have been suggested: that through watching lesbian sex the male viewer retains power over female independence through voyeurism; that lesbian scenes remove the male body from the pornographic spectacle, thus negating potential turn-offs or the danger of

homoerotic arousal; that they set up a consoling narrative in which two women are urgently in need of a 'missing phallus'; that male arousal occurs in response to social and religious taboos against same-sex acts; or simply that they double the visual pleasure. Of course any of these factors, in isolation or combination, may apply; it scarcely needs to be added that sexuality is too diverse to be tied down to a single psychological paradigm. But which of these aspects makes sense here? Sadly, *99 Women* is one of Franco's least enlightened treatments of lesbianism; the interpolation of Herbert Lom's Governor into the sequence in which Zoe rapes Marie, coupled with the abrupt transformation in the sequence from horror to titillation, suggests a defiantly masculine power-trip in which lesbian rape becomes a site of male sexual control. We seem to be dealing primarily with the voyeur who retains control over lesbian sex by means of his gaze. It's interesting to speculate on the author of this scene; after all, the script was by Towers, and sure enough, it's his wife, Maria Röhm, who plays the victim. It would not be impertinent, therefore, to suggest that Towers, rather than Franco, is the 'source' of the gaze here. Lom is Towers's stand-in, while Maria Röhm is the object of her husband's fantasy. Franco, meanwhile, is in the slightly demeaning position of helping his boss to get off. If that's true, his responsibility for the scene can perhaps be mitigated. The lesbian molestation scene keeps hairy male buttocks out of the equation for commercial reasons (no slight against Herbert Lom, a gentleman and a thespian, and not without sexual charm himself in a 'dirty uncle' kind of way, but I don't think paying audiences were queueing to see his ass). Finally, the scene ends with a shot of Lom looming into the lens, with the implication that he has crossed the space between voyeur and object to provide the 'missing phallus'. Finally, we have to note the narrative circumstance in which lesbian sex is being shown, namely prison. Women can 'go lesbian' in prison without it being the expression of a 'deviant' lifestyle. The women's prison sex fantasy thus works from a normative base; crucially the women do not have access to men, so it's 'okay' if they turn lesbian. Prison functions as an alibi for the abandonment of heterosexual norms. The women are not really lesbians, they're 'forced into it' by frustration or coercion, so the male viewer need not feel rejected; the girls can't get a 'real' fuck, so they end up bumping pussies. From the point of view of cinema censorship and the moral attitudes of the 1960s (not forgetting Franco's own upbringing in a repressive right-wing dictatorship) the prison setting is both a tactical construct, designed to give same-sex erotica a narrative justification for the censor, and a metaphorical vessel for the repression that shapes violent sexual fantasy in the first place. Being a site of repression, quite literally, it follows that the violence of the system should strike an echo in the violence expressed between inmates: hence women-in-prison films offer a suitable place (and a perfect narrative alibi) for depictions of rough lesbian sex.

It's not just the rape scene that's problematic; the depiction of lesbians is pretty shabby throughout. Take Zoe, Rosalba Neri's



Top: After a fight with Helga (Elisa Montés, bottom right of frame), Zoe (Rosalba Neri, centre) faces off against Superintendent Díaz (Mercedes McCambridge, left); rumours of a missing lesbian scene between Prisoners 40 and 59 are unproven... Bottom: Zoe makes friends with Helga (Elisa Montés) and enjoys the company of another inmate (actress and scene unknown).





character. It turns out she's not a real lesbian: she explains to Marie, after sexually assaulting her, that she's only in prison because she murdered a woman called Grace, the owner of a lesbian strip club where she worked. Grace, it transpires, was a 'real lesbian', a tough cookie running a watering hole for a mannish lesbian clientele. Poor Zoe, we're meant to think, having to strip in front of these bull-dykes! When she took a male lover Grace became insanely jealous and pulled a gun on her, and in the struggle Grace was shot... Upon hearing that her rapist is just a straight girl wrongly imprisoned for defending herself against a jealous dyke, Marie says, and I kid you not: "I'm... sorry... I'm so terribly terribly sorry". The two women then kiss, cuddle and fondle each other! It takes a certain kind of wrong-headedness to write a scene this utterly cynical, in which a heterosexual rape victim forgives her lesbian attacker, apologises for misunderstanding her, and then consoles her *by having sex with her!* In its epic stupidity the scene comes close to a weird sort of greatness; one little twist to signal deliberate absurdity and you could almost call it Buñuelian.

There is another factor to mention in weighing up *99 Women*. We've registered our objections, we've noted the absurd sexual dynamics, but it has to be said that a healthy sense of camp can facilitate a much less fraught appreciation of the film. For all the criticism I've levelled at the lesbian rape scene, one has to point out that when Herbert Lom gets in on the action, he does so with the words "It's hot in here" and "Let's make ourselves comfortable". Marie's sexual 'forgiveness' of Zoe inspires such disbelieving laughter that it overwrites annoyance. And as for Mercedes McCambridge, the Hollywood veteran is so hissably wicked as the authoritarian superintendant that you half expect her to climb on a broomstick at the end and head for the skies. But my favourite scene comes during a chase through the jungle, when fleeing inmate Rosa discovers that her lover, Juan, whom we saw earlier professing his undying devotion, has been killed whilst trying to escape the men's prison. A sad story, but at least lover-boy's best friend, a handsome Brazilian called Ricardo, has a token of Juan's love to pass on to her. He gives Rosa a handkerchief, which the dying man wanted her to have. It's all very touching. And speaking of 'touching', Ricardo uses the opportunity to steer Rosa into a sexy clinch, stopping just short of fondling her breasts as he murmurs, "Don't cry, please don't. He was like a brother to me. Often, he said you were the most lovely girl in the world. He gave me the handkerchief for you. He asked me to look after you, to help you, to like you, to love you..." It gets more and more 'inappropriate': "I loved him" sighs Rosa, playing herself in Ricardo's arms like a porno centrefold. "Me too," Ricardo agrees, hands everywhere, "He was... a very good man..." Far be it from me to condemn a girl for responding to news of her lover's death by screwing his best friend, but you have to laugh: where in the world is plausibility? Where is the wrenching trauma, or the quiet dignity of grief? It's marvellous nonsense like this that transforms *99 Women* from a plodding softcore drama into a Jess Franco film.

Ultimately, however, for all the laughs, the world-view here is one of total cynicism. It's expressed in the way one of the runaway girls sees the jungle rape of Rosa as an advantage, slowing down the pursuit and helping her to escape; it's there too in the satisfied smirk with which the prisoner best placed in the prison hierarchy, Zoe, watches goodie-two-shoes governess Leonie leave the prison in abject humiliation, roundly beaten by the machinations of Superintendent Díaz and Governor Santos. That the cynicism of the characters is shared by the filmmakers is regrettable, but it didn't do the film any harm at the box office. *99 Women* was a huge success when released, spending several weeks at the top of *Variety's* film chart in 1969. A distribution manager at Commonwealth United was initially so sceptical that he verbally attacked the film and its director prior to its release. However, Franco was vindicated when the movie started grossing millions of dollars. As he explained in 1996, "It was very funny because later I was in London preparing another film and they invited me to Simpson's, of course the best English restaurant in London ... the guy who originally spoke to me said, 'I was wrong. Your film is much more beautiful than I thought when I first looked at it. When I saw the film I didn't know what it was and I had read a lot of reviews saying negative things about it.' So, did they decide to give me four million dollars ... to make a really big film? No! They decided to give me more films to do, but all with the same budget to get the same profit!"<sup>1</sup>

**Franco on screen:** Franco is seen in the flashback to Marie's gang rape, and in the Spanish version plays a soldier arriving by boat at the end of the film.

**Cast and crew:** Mercedes McCambridge as Superintendent Díaz plays her role to the hilt, coming on like a combination of Adolf Hitler and Bette Davis. Some have argued that she's over the top; Franco himself mentions that she liked a drink or two while 'on duty'. I personally think she's magnificent, and in her own eccentric way is actually giving us something believable; a woman so accustomed to absolute power that a challenge to her authority drives her to apoplexy.

**Music:** The insanely catchy title theme (believe me, you'll be humming it for days) is a belter, written by Bruno Nicolai with lyrics by Audrey Nohra Stainton (who also penned the lyrics to 'Deep Deep Down', the theme to Mario Bava's *Danger: Diabolik*). The 'romantic' theme that plays over Zoe's rape of Marie would reappear in a slightly different arrangement as the title music for *Eugenie* (1970).

**Locations:** The jungle scenes were shot just outside Rio de Janeiro, at a National Park near to the Copacabana beach during downtime on the *Girl from Rio* shoot. The locations look suspiciously like those used in *The Blood of Fu Manchu*, so it's probably the same park. Prison interiors and exteriors were shot afterwards, chiefly in Alicante's Santa Barbara Castle, with further studio scenes added in Madrid and Rome.

**UK theatrical release:** According to the BBFC's website, *99 Women* was denied a UK cinema certificate on the 11th April 1969.

By the summer of 1972, however, the film was playing cinema clubs in London on a double bill with Franco's *Venus in Furs*, another supposedly banned title. *Continental Film Review* lists the two films playing at the Piccadilly Centa (formerly the Jacey) in May 1972, and a sex cinema in Dalston, East London, in July of that year.

**Connections:** Although *99 Women* was by far the raciest, most explicit film in the women-in-prison subgenre in 1968, such movies date back to the early Hollywood talkies. Among the old lags in the genre are Marion Gering's *Ladies of the Big House* (1932) with Sylvia Sidney; William Keighley's *Ladies They Talk About* (1933) with Barbara Stanwyck; Lew Landers's *Condemned Women* (1938) with Sally Eilers; Robert Florey's *Lady Gangster* (1942); Edgar G. Ulmer's *Girls in Chains* (1943); John Cromwell's *Caged* (1950) with Eleanor Parker and Agnes Moorhead; Bernard Vorhaus's *So Young, So Bad* (1950), co-directed by an uncredited Edgar G. Ulmer; Lewis Seiler's *Women's Prison* (1955) starring Ida Lupino; Edward L. Cahn's *Girls in Prison* (1956); Edward Bernds's *Reform School Girl* (1957) with Luana Anders; and Walter Doniger's *House of Women* (1962) starring Shirley Knight. ... Trivia corner: a circus act called '99 mujeres contra 3 hombres' by German circus impresario Curt Doorlay toured Spain in 1943, when Franco would have been thirteen.

**Other versions:** Comparing the Spanish version, *99 mujeres*, with the American version, *99 Women*, reveals many differences. Of course, *99 mujeres* is much shorter, eliminating a lot of the sexually provocative material. The most blatant excisions are Zoe's rape of Marie, the latter's lesbian submission, and the flashback sequence that shows how Zoe came to be arrested. Also snipped is a sequence showing Zoe in bed with another prisoner, while Marie looks on with something akin to jealousy. Zoe taunts Marie about the new governess who's taken an interest in Marie's case, implying that the older woman's concern is simply lesbian lust dressed up as morality. An even shorter scene of intimacy between women, with Zoe and her new lover in a gentle clinch, is missing too. When the scene turns into a catfight, however, the Spanish version reverts to Franco's cut. So while scantily clad women punching each other was admissible, any suggestion of lesbianism, no matter how tender, was not. The gang rape of Rosa is missing, but that's not surprising: it's way too unpleasant for Spanish cinemas in 1969. Cutaways lasting just a few seconds are missing too (for instance the Spanish version removes the first few seconds of girls arriving in the cells) and there are numerous insignificant re-orderings of material. The editing of both versions favours Italian starlet Luciana Paluzzi (to appease the Italian financiers), giving her numerous close-ups although she dies ten minutes into the film. However *99 mujeres* features Paluzzi in an extra scene missing from other versions: dying of heroin withdrawal she stares up at a dazzling white lightbulb and whispers "*Madre...madre...*". *99 mujeres* also features more material with the doctor (José Martínez Blanco) who comes to certify Natalie's cause of death; we see him arriving by boat and being driven to the prison, whereas the US version begins

with him inside the prison being berated by the Superintendent, who responds to his moral protestations by snapping that this is a punishment establishment, not a place for treating ulcers! The dialogue between them is longer in the Spanish version, with the doctor expressing greater dissatisfaction, and it all ends on a great shot of Mercedes McCambridge storming off down the corridor, her hands clasped tightly behind her back in fury. Presumably this material was included to support the doctor's reappearance in the coda, in which he brings a cadre of officials to the prison. One of them, hiding behind dark glasses and with a thick leather glove holding a cigarette to his lips, is Jess Franco – on the side of the angels after all! ... The wholesale censor cuts to *99 mujeres* brought to an end Franco's long friendship with the actor and poet Marcelo Arroita Jauregui. Jauregui had recently been admitted to the Spanish censor board, and despite having appeared in Franco's *The Blood of Fu Manchu* just a few months earlier he apparently blew a gasket watching *99 Women*. Jauregui supported heavy cuts, so Franco terminated their friendship.

The 'XXX' version *Les Brûlantes*, unleashed in French porno theatres in 1974 by Franco's producer *du jour*, Comptoir Français du Film Production, is just a joke. It clumsily stitches nine hardcore scenes into the original film, beginning with Marie's dream sequence, which is no longer a surrealistic account of multiple rape but instead a rather dull two-and-a-half-minute scene with two women, neither of whom resemble Maria Röhm, groping their pussies ... A second hardcore insert occurs during the lesbian rape scene. We cut from Herbert Lom lecherously watching Marie's lesbian assault to a frankly bizarre shot of a young man pounding away between a woman's legs in what looks like Sister Jeanne's white-tiled room from Ken Russell's *The Devils*. What this says about the gender of Rosalba Neri's character is hard to fathom; if she's actually a well-hung young man from the neck down she's kept it pretty well hidden until now. After returning for a couple of minutes to Franco's purposefully out-of-focus shots, with their impressionistic sensuality, and a glimpse of Herbert Lom once again staring at the action, we cut back to see what he's watching: a close-up of a penis banging into a vagina, whilst a third party, some sort of female psychiatric nurse, fondles the male participant ... A third interjection, this time well photographed and fitting neatly with the film Franco made, simply inserts a lovemaking scene (supposedly Zoe and her boyfriend) during Zoe's extended flashback ... The fourth hardcore sequence is, to me, the most curious. Filmed slightly out of focus on a nondescript beach, this ninety-second 'flashback' supposedly shows how Maria Röhm's character came to be imprisoned. An older man, sixty at least, rapes a woman who's supposed to be Marie, stabbing her and then ravishing her unconscious nude body. The whole thing is completely amateurish and illogically conceived (how did Marie survive, and why is *she* the guilty party?), but there's something very macabre about the scene. It has a seedy, sleazy, unpleasant quality that I must say piqued my curiosity; if it had been shot



by Franco in 1974 for an unreleased film just after *Lorna... the Exorcist* I wouldn't be surprised ... Insert No.5 involves intimacy between Rosa and her male lover as they plot their mutual escape; the most you can say about this is that at least the gender of the participants matches the original footage ... Insert No.7 adds a penetration cum-shot lasting about thirty seconds to the tryst between Rosa and Ricardo. A pity the guy standing in for Ricardo is so pale and un-Brazilian ... Insert No.8 is totally disconnected and bizarre; during the girls' final-reel dash for freedom through the jungle, two women we've never seen before – looking, if I'm being ungallant, like a pair of dowdy drag queens – hunker down in the foliage for some dreadful lesbian fumbling ... Finally, insert No.9 could have been the nastiest, as it's added to 'spice up' Rosa's gang rape – however, the victim in the curly ginger wig looks so unlike Valentina Godoy that the potential for horror leaks away.

There is a *fourth* version of *99 Women* with yet more extra footage. The Greek video release adds a huge soap-opera subplot to Zoe's flashback scene, featuring two new characters, Darren and Tracy. However the footage was definitely not by Franco, and is clearly filmed on American coastal locations! I have no idea from where this material originates.

**Problematica:** IMDb currently adds Brazilian actor Olívia Pineschi but she does not appear in the film.

**Press coverage:** *Variety* were unimpressed with the film itself, calling it “turgidly written, schematically directed and exaggeratedly acted”, but their reviewer did comment with some admiration that it marked a new step forward in the use of sexploitational material in mainstream cinema. “Few pix, if any, have combined elements in the manner of *99 Women*. Leaving aside the sexploiter sub-trade, sex elements have historically entered regular “commercial” fare via “class” product, then later filtered down to routine releases ... In perspective of today's market, pic on hand has all of the cast, story and production attributes of a second feature – except for that liberal dose of frank (and probably from male point of view, moderately arousing) sex.”<sup>2</sup> *The New York Times* were not so nuanced: “Despite the appearance of such professionals as Mercedes McCambridge, Maria Schell and Herbert Lom and hints of sexuality, a discriminate moviegoer suffers more than any of the harried inmates in *99 Women*.”<sup>3</sup>

## JUSTINE

West Germany, Italy, Liechtenstein, USA [& UK] 1968

Italian visa number: 53569

*Original theatrical title in country of origin*

**Marquis de Sade: Justine** (GER theatrical)

**Justine ovvero Le disavventure della virtù** (IT theatrical)

**Justine and Juliet** (UK theatrical)

note: there is no ‘Liechtensteinian’ version of the film

*Alternative titles*

**Marquis de Sade's “Justine”** (onscreen USA/UK theatrical)

**Les Infortunes de la vertu** (FR theatrical)

**De Sade Les Infortunes de la vertu** (FR theatrical poster)

**Justine ou les infortunes de la vertu** (FR theatrical - CNC)

**Deadly Sanctuary** (US video)

**Una pasión mortal** (SP video)

**Dulce Justine** (SP video)

**The Misfortune(s) of Virtue** (BBFC admission sheet 1969)

**The Misfortunes of Virtue (Justine)** (BBFC censor sheet 1971)

*Production companies*

**Corona Film-Produktion** (Munich)

**Aica Cinematografica** (Rome)

**Établissement Sargon** (Vaduz, Liechtenstein)

**American International Pictures** (Los Angeles)

**Towers of London** (London) [uncredited]

© 1968. **Établissement Sargon** (Vaduz, Liechtenstein) [English-language prints]

*Theatrical distributors*

**Constantin-Film** (Munich)

**C.I.D.I.F.** [Consorzio Italiano Distributori Indipendenti Film]

**American International Pictures** (Los Angeles)

**Anthony Balch Films Ltd.** (London)

*Timeline*

Shooting date	21 May-23 June	1968
Italian visa number issued	01 April	1969
Italy (Rome)	05 April	1969
German censor certificate	27 May	1969
West Germany	13 June	1969
France	04 March	1970
UK ‘X’ issued (as <i>Justine and Juliet</i> )	28 July	1971

*Theatrical running time*

France	105m
West Germany	102m
UK	104m

**Cast:** **Klaus Kinski** (Marquis de Sade). **Romina Power** (Justine). **Maria Röhm** (Juliette). **Rosemary Dexter** (Claudine, a prostitute). **Carmen de Lirio** (Madame de Buisson, brothel owner). **Akim Tamiroff** (Monsieur du Harpin). **Gustavo Re** (Desroches). **Mercedes McCambridge** (Madame Dubois, condemned prisoner). **Serena Vergano** (female prisoner who describes Madame Dubois). **José Manuel Martín** (Victor). **Mike Brendel** (Pierre). **Harald Leipnitz** (Raymond, an artist). **Horst Frank** (Marquis de Bressac). **Angel Petit** (Jasmin, the Marquis' 'friend'). **Sylva Koscina** (Marquise de Bressac). **Howard Vernon** (Brother Clément). **Jack Palance** (Brother Antonin). **Rosalba Neri** (Florette, a 'companion'). **Claudia Gravy** (Olivia, a 'companion'). **Gérard Tichy** (Comte de Courville, justice minister). *uncredited:* **Luis Ciges** (Brother Emanuel). **Miguel de la Riva** (Brother Ifiquiel). **Juan Olaguibel** (large, dumb-looking friend of Dubois). **Jess Franco** (turbaned storyteller in theatre).

**Credits:** directed by **Jess Franco**. screenplay: **Harry Alan Towers** [as 'Peter Welbeck'] / **Erich Krohnke**, **Arpad De Riso** [IT prints]; based on the novel [*Justine ou les malheurs de la vertu*] by **Marquis de Sade**. director of photography: **Manuel Merino**. editor: **Nicholas Wentworth** / **Ilse Wilken**, **Francesco Bertuccioli** [IT prints]. art director: **Santiago Ontañón** / **Karl Schneider** [IT prints]. music by **Bruno Nicolai**. produced by **Harry Alan Towers**. executive producer: **Alexander Gruter** [IT prints]. production managers: **Hans Engelman**, **Giacinto Solito**. production supervisor: **Juan Estelrich**. presented by **Franco Cancellieri** [IT prints]. assistant director: **Ricardo Franco** / **Dietmar Behnke** [IT prints]. camera operator: **Javier Pérez Zofio** [IT prints]. make-up: **Telemaco Tilli** [IT prints]. prints: **Istituto Luce S.p.A.** [IT prints]. sound: **Adriano Taloni** [IT prints]. *Italian version:* **Ager Tecnica S.p.A.** with the collaboration of the actors of **C.D.C.**.

**Synopsis:** *The Marquis de Sade is sent to prison at The Bastille. Inflamed with the rage of his fantasies, he begins writing ... In a convent, Justine and her sister Juliette are informed that their father has died. Since the church no longer receives his money, the girls are put out on the street. Juliette, practical and worldly, heads for a brothel run by Madame de Buisson. Justine, however, is shy and innocent and cannot bear to stay. In the city square she encounters a Catholic priest, who offers to look after her money and sends her to find sanctuary at the inn of his friend Monsieur du Harpin. However, the innkeeper has never heard of the priest and Justine realises she's been conned of all her worldly wealth. du Harpin offers her work as a maid. A tenant tries to molest her but she resists. She's accused of stealing from a tenant, Monsieur Desroches, and carted off to prison where she meets Madame Dubois, a murderess. Dubois escapes, taking Justine with the intention of pimping her. When Dubois' gang try to rape the girl, Justine flees. She meets Raymond, a handsome young painter, who wins her trust; however, soldiers come looking for her and she is forced to flee again. Juliette meanwhile is busy*

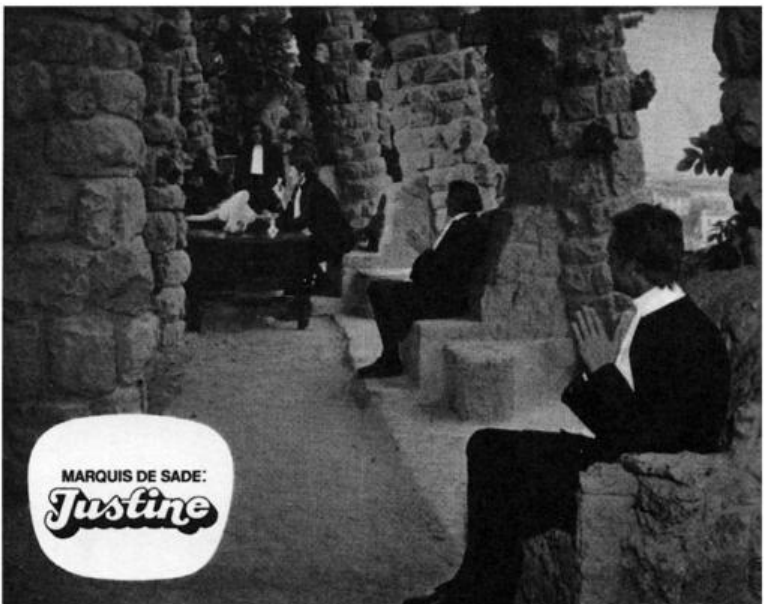
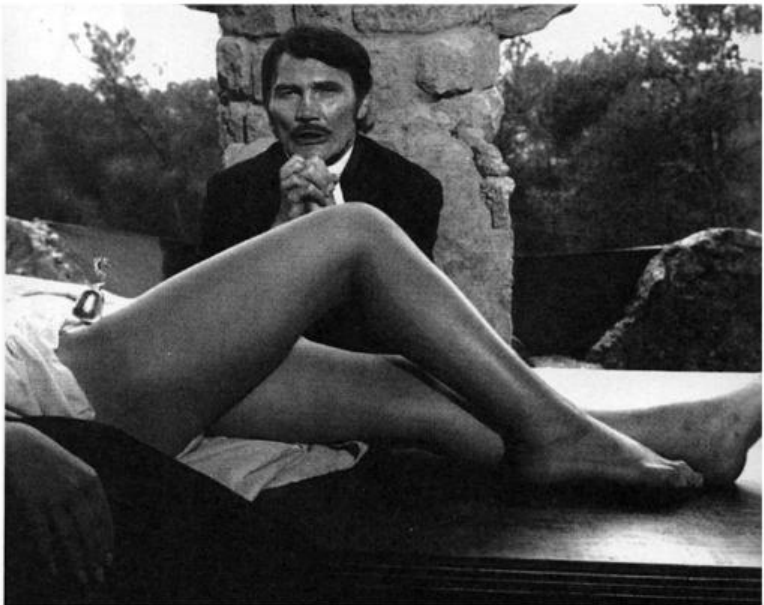
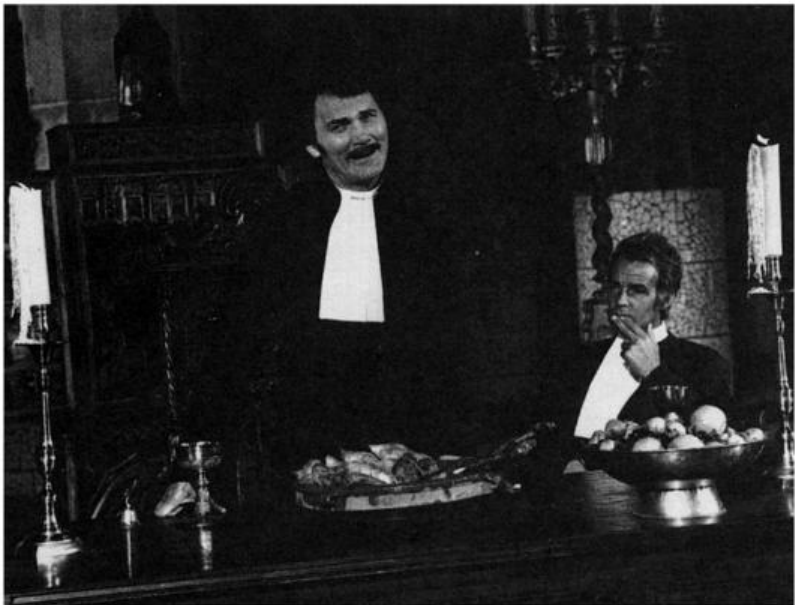
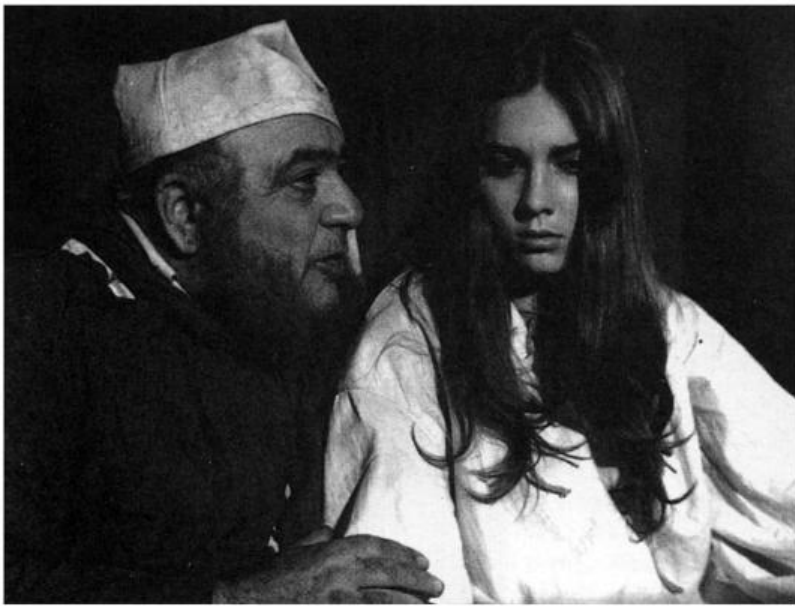
*with a plot to steal a vast amount of money from one of her clients ... In the woods Justine meets a rich nobleman, the Marquis de Bressac, who is frolicking with his male lover. He takes Justine back to his mansion and employs her as his wife's maid. The Marquis is plotting to kill his wife; upon succeeding, he frames Justine for the murder. She is branded with an "M" for "murderess" and released. Justine seeks help at a monastery where, unbeknown to her, monks known as "The Brethren" indulge in all manner of sadistic debauchery. They chain Justine and torture her. Brother Antonin, the leader of the Brethren, recognises in Justine the true face of suffering. Here is a girl who feels it is her spiritual duty to endure. A night of agony for Justine and joyful wickedness for Antonin is brought to an unexpected end when lightning strikes the monastery. Justine escapes and makes her way back to Paris. She is taken in by Madame Dubois, who now runs a burlesque night club. Justine is made to stand naked on the stage. The 'M' branded into her flesh is spotted by the crowd and they bay for her to be executed. When all seems lost, Juliette, who has married into wealth, steps in and rescues her sister. Justine is reunited with Raymond and lives happily ever after ... Back in his cell in the Bastille, the Marquis de Sade runs his hands across his face in anguish, then crosses out the last line of his manuscript ...*

**Production notes:** *Justine*, based on the scandalous 18th century novel by The Marquis de Sade, was made by Jess Franco in Spain in the summer of 1968. It's a lavish, well-upholstered production, with plenty of its reputed \$1 million budget up on the screen. However, for a variety of reasons, ranging from bad casting to the commercial and censorship pressures of the day, it failed to achieve its director's ambitions. According to Franco, the initial suggestion to make the film came from Towers, who gave him a script he'd been working on, based on Sade's *Justine*. Franco approved the treatment and leaped at the chance to bring one of his favourite writers to the screen. According to Towers' the film was initially set up as a Spanish-Italian-French co-production, but after reading the script, the Spanish co-producers (Producciones Cinematográficas Balcázar) declared they would have to pull out because of the high likelihood of trouble from the Spanish authorities. Nevertheless, the production was shot in Spain, for seven weeks, in Barcelona's picturesque Gothic Quarter, which had the unfortunate effect of drawing attention from the Spanish authorities: the Dirección General de Espectáculos demanded that disciplinary proceedings be instigated against the production<sup>2</sup> and the incident further soured Franco's already fractious relationship with the Spanish film establishment (see *Succubus*).

Though bought by AIP for American distribution, *Justine* appears never to have been shown in US cinemas (confusion on this topic has been fostered by the existence of an unrelated film called *Justine*, directed by George Cukor and based on Lawrence Durrell's *The Alexandria Quartet*, which was also released in 1969). In fact the first American release for Franco's film came in 1986, when it was released on video under the title *Deadly Sanctuary*. The reason would seem to have a lot to do with AIP's concurrent







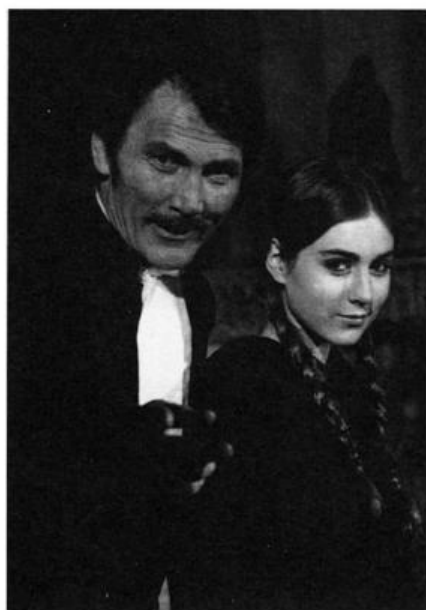
MARQUIS DE SADE:  
*Justine*



MARQUIS DE SADE:  
*Justine*

**Facing page:**  
 Monsieur Du Harpin (Akim Tamaroff) paws Justine (Romina Power) ... kindly artist Raymond (Harald Leipnitz) finds Justine unconscious in the road ... Brother Antonin (Jack Palance) worships at the altar of his lust ... Antonin's brethren assemble (in Barcelona's famous Park Güell, doubling as the world's weirdest S&M monastery) ... Antonin, dining with Cordelia (actress unknown) finds a novel place to put the cruet ... and later addresses the room on his endless quest for murderous passion, watched by Brother Ifiquiel (Miguel de la Riva).

**This page:**  
 Justine imprisoned ... Palance and Powers between takes ... Justine the guileless ... Raymond carries Justine to his modest abode (actually the Pabellón de entrada in Park Güell, Barcelona, by Antonio Gaudí).







production *De Sade* (1969), a hugely expensive and ill-fated project which was completed by an uncredited Roger Corman after director Cy Endfield dropped out. Having thrown so much money at this project, A.I.P. may have decided that the Towers-Franco film, acquired as part of a package, was likely to hinder the financial returns of their own production, and so quietly shelved it.

**Review:** Despite a great cast and high production values, this story of a virtuous innocent hanging on to her morals and her hymen while being abused by all-and-sundry lacks that essential aura of Sadean malevolence. The UK's *Monthly Film Bulletin* reviewer hit the nail on the head when he commented in 1972 that "It is not so much the principles of pleasure and pain as fairytale versions of wickedness and virtue that animate the movie."<sup>3</sup> Despite some memorable sequences, the tone wavers drastically and at times sinks to a comedic 'bawdiness' more akin to the Carry On films than the lacerating wit of the Marquis. At over two hours long, and with little sex and violence, *Justine* tends to drag, and while the attractive Barcelona locations afford plentiful eye candy, you would hope for more than a well heeled costume drama from an adaptation of one of the most shocking novels ever written. For all of its risqué elements, and the scent, here and there, of Sade's cruel humour, *Justine* is almost as chaste and uptight as its heroine. Its knees are firmly locked together; its asshole tightly clenched. Flashing just a few heaving bosoms, *Justine* is governed by the limitations forced upon it by the American producers, by Towers's lacklustre script, and the failings of its inexpressive female lead. The latter issue was especially vexatious to Franco: he'd intended the role of Justine for the English actress Rosemary Dexter but found himself at the last minute forced to cast Tyrone Power's daughter Romina. He told Carlos Aguilar: "[Power] was totally incapable of playing a masochistic character ... thus I was forced to change the whole screenplay [...] turning it into a Disney-like fairytale where the girl has become a simpleton lost in a nightmarish forest."<sup>4</sup> In an amusing interview for the Blue Underground DVD, he said, "It was very difficult for me, because she was a passenger, wandering around, as if I were making *Bambi 2*!"<sup>5</sup> As for Rosemary Dexter, she ended up playing the minor character of Claudine (though it must be said that whatever it was Franco saw in her is hidden from view in the film).

*Justine* - or, to use the film's full onscreen title, *Marquis de Sade's "Justine"* - begins with Sade (Klaus Kinski) conveyed by horse-drawn carriage to the Bastille (actually Alicante's Santa Barbara Castle). There he is deposited in a cell, where he paces in agitation for several minutes. Images of bound, bleeding women flash through his mind, and across the screen. After working himself into a rage, Sade spies a quill, some paper and a writing desk thoughtfully provided by his gaolers (hey, that's the French for you). Settling down at the desk, he begins writing. This establishing scene, to which we return several times throughout the film, emphasises the cultural credentials of the project. Sade's literary reputation is used as an imprimatur in much the same way that Edgar Allen

Poe's was used by the Corman films of the day, while his presence onscreen reminds us that an 'eminent figure' is accountable for the debauchery depicted. Wonderful though it is to see Klaus Kinski play the Marquis de Sade, these wraparound scenes are largely superfluous, and it's actually quite a perverse waste of Kinski's talents to have him silently pacing and scribbling when he could have delivered so much more.

Despite the fact that *Justine* proposes itself as a 'literary adaptation' there are times when the bowdlerization of de Sade is so grievous that one must try to forget the source material and look upon the film as just a racier than average period romp. In the misplaced moral schema of the Towers script, we're supposed to feel sympathy for poor Justine, even as we get our jollies watching her molested. Personally though, I wasn't buying it for a minute. I lost what little sympathy I might have held in reserve when she stumbled upon two men, a nobleman and one of his staff, about to have sex together in the woods. Peeking from behind some foliage, this abused innocent, whose responses to others thus far have been characterised entirely by bruised sorrow and plaintive supplication, giggles at the two men and skips off. While the filmmakers clearly thought that having her patronise two homosexuals was a surefire audience-pleaser, it compromises her precious 'virtue' by giving her someone upon whom to look down. De Sade, it should be noted, was entirely in favour of homosexuality, and delivered scene after scene of it in his work, describing it with the same relish he afforded to heterosexual activities. He valued it on many levels: for its sovereign pleasures, for shock value, and for its ability to set the practitioner at odds with Church and society. His message was clear - all acts of the flesh are equal, and should be explored without restraint. Justine's perky little giggle at the sight of two men in a clinch puts her firmly in the 'stupid bourgeois' category, so as far as I'm concerned she deserves all she gets. Of course the script can't resist making fun either - the Marquis de Bressac and his boyfriend are given the tones of simpering English toffs (despite being supposedly French), no doubt to amuse that subset of American viewers who regard all Englishmen as croquet-playing faggots. These effeminate characterisations are a deliberate distortion of Sade's novel, in which the two men are a nobleman ("of such a bearing and presence one might suppose him of an elevated degree," thinks Justine) and a virile 'domestic' possessed of one of the prodigious members so common in Sade's work. In the book, Justine notes that "The young lord was constantly the woman and although there was about him what suggested the possibility he could have acted the man in his turn, he had not for one instant even the appearance of wishing to."<sup>6</sup> In other words the sex act she spies upon, with the shocked prudery so ridiculed by Sade, takes place between two masculine men; Franco's decision to turn them both into simpering 'nancy-boys' in powder, rouge and wigs is designed to ensure that audiences laugh with Justine at the spectacle of homosexuality, instead of (as ought to be the case) laughing at her outraged piety.

The first half of the film is taken up with plot developments that occur in the first eighty pages of Sade's novel, which runs for just under 300 pages in total. This of course is typical of the problems that have always afflicted literary adaptations in the cinema, at least until the advent of the three hour movie in today's popular cinema. More problematic are the numerous distortions running counter to Sade's intentions, which surely must have rankled with Franco as much as they do any Sade aficionado. Among them is a voice-over reading Sade's text with a doughty seriousness that entirely misses the point. When Sade muses, "*Must it be true that prosperity attends the very worst of conduct? Must it always be that disaster dogs the heels of virtue?*"<sup>77</sup> the tone should be mocking and ironical. The rhetoric is that of the despairing clergyman contemplating the cruel mystery of God's plan, and in Sade it would be shot through with malevolent humour, revelling in the truth so exposed. The voice-over in *Justine* makes him sound like an earnest country priest having a bad day writing a sermon. Then there's the seven minute interlude in which Justine enjoys the tender ministrations of a sensitive artist called Raimond. This is a lamentable inversion of the character called Rodin in Sade's novel. He's supposed to be a scheming paedophile, running a school exclusively for beautiful children whom he flagellates and ravishes. Instead, in an effort to ventilate the novel with 'light and shade', Towers and Franco turn him into that least Sadean of figures, the just and selfless man. Obviously the original character could not be depicted, but to turn this child molester into a virtuous man, who declines to paint Justine nude and covers up her nakedness out of deference for the way she has suffered, is a grievous stain on the book's world-view. Better to have excised him altogether. Likewise, the climax of the encounter with the Brethren of a Benedictine monastery, in which a thundercrack and a lightning bolt strike the place during a debauched torture session, allowing Justine to escape. In the book, Justine sees her chance to flee after one of the head monks leaves to become General of the Benedictine Order by order of His Holiness the Pope! The remaining monks busy themselves with the torture of another young woman, and Justine uses the distraction to run away. There is no punishment, from either God or Man, visited by Sade upon the fiends at the monastery. The only lightning bolt in Sade's version strikes the heroine!

Fortunately, two magnificent actors, Jack Palance and Mercedes McCambridge, breathe such fire into their roles that they make the film worth watching. Many of the Franco-Towers films boast prestige acting talent (Christopher Lee, George Sanders, Leo Genn, Klaus Kinski, Herbert Lom), but these two trump the lot of them. Mercedes McCambridge is fast becoming one of my favourite actresses on the basis of *Justine* and *99 Women*; in both films she outclasses everyone around her. Just listen to her as Madame Dubois, libertine madame and master criminal, rasping at Romina Power and curling her tongue around an outrageous French accent, and you'll understand why William Friedkin was so shrewd and perceptive, casting her as the voice of the demon in

*The Exorcist*. As for Palance, playing the lascivious lust-worshipper Brother Antonin, he's gloriously out of control. According to Franco, his riotous performance was due to being utterly shitfaced on red wine by seven o'clock each morning. This may sound like idle gossip, but watching him rant and rave and bounce off the scenery you would happily lay money on the truth of it. Palance can barely speak without affecting some kind of demoniacal grimace, delivering each syllable with an emphasis previously unendured by the English language. "*And so our search goes on, and on and on and on and on and on!!!!*" he raves, "*Perhaps there's no end to it, still we seek for what, for what we do not know...*" He's like a force ten gale rushing through the film. The combination of a grand setting, the arcane poise of the Unholy Order, and the pungent aura of derangement as Palance soars over the top saves *Justine's* latter stages from sinking into tedium. If the whole film were as entertaining as this it would be a masterpiece. (Incidentally, during Palance's rant there's a curious ellipse, possibly a missing line. Brother Antonin declares that he and his brethren are meditating on 'the supreme pleasure'. Sadly the audio fades down and we don't hear what that is: knowing Sade it's either murder, coprophagy, or some stomach-churning combination of the two).

The film ends with Justine saved from the gallows by the intervention of her sister Juliette, who has been living a life of vice and doing very well thank-you. She is now the mistress of a Count, influential and rich. Justine declares that she has finally had enough and intends to turn to vice, only for Juliette to claim that a life of libertinage is in fact 'hollow'. She implores Justine to hold on to her piety, for surely God intends a great reward in heaven! Justine and Raimond are then seen walking off together in the shadow of the Church. This is a grievous insult to the text (remember that in the book, Raimond/Rodin was a child molester), although the ending of Sade's book is far from easy to summarise, dependent as we are on three strikingly different versions (see 'Connections'). Franco concludes with a shot of the Marquis in his prison cell, quill in hand, crossing out the last sentence of his manuscript. Clearly a heartfelt gesture on Franco's part, it has two distinct levels of meaning. On the one hand, it can be read as depicting Sade rejecting his own expurgated finale (again, see 'Connections'). On the other, it's clearly Jess Franco, drawing a line through the film's weak and unsatisfactory happy ending. In trying to cooperate with his producers, Franco had ended up despoiling his own vision; this final shot is a sincere attempt to address not only Sade's difficulties in the 1790s but also the pressures under which the film was made in the 1960s. In an interview with Alain Petit, Jess Franco explained: "*Obviously, the Americans did not want the story to end like it does in the book! My film was supposed to end with the meeting of Juliette and Justine. It was a way out, while remaining faithful to Sade. Then we made the first cut, but the Americans did not approve it. They were ready to go back and shoot another ending themselves. I preferred to do it myself.*"<sup>78</sup> One can easily sympathise with Franco's predicament. This was no ordinary project for him

but an engagement with a writer who inflamed his imagination like no other. No doubt it also excited his ego to bring Sade to the screen. (Before this there was only *Vice and Virtue*, Roger Vadim's poorly received 1963 adaptation of *Justine*, and Buñuel's brief dalliance with Sade in *L'Age d'Or*.) And yet despite his vitality and ambition, Franco found himself thwarted, his name stamped on a movie that trivialised its source. With the embarrassment festering in his mind, one imagines Franco vowing to exorcise his failure by seeking freer opportunities with companies who would allow him to cross whatever frontiers he might choose. *Justine* may be hopelessly compromised, but making it gave Franco an extra shot of determination to do things his own way. A vital component of his wildly unorthodox career begins right here, with Klaus Kinski as the Marquis de Sade, scratching his quill through that shameful capitulation to the mainstream.

**Franco on screen:** One of the highlights of this overstuffed romance is Franco's own role as the host of a bawdy-show featuring the reluctant Justine. The girl is compelled by Madame Dubois to pose nude in front of a packed house of leering theatregoers, as Franco, front of house, delivers some cock-and-bull story about the girl being raised by monkeys. Barking at her to disrobe, he puts himself in the spotlight as the purveyor of pulchritude. By now surely even the gentlest viewer will have lost patience with Justine herself? If so, her awkwardness and embarrassment arouse nothing but the innocent merriment of the wicked.

**Cast and crew:** Sixteen-year-old actress Romina Power, the poor child, is hopeless as Justine, a failure for which Jess Franco and just about every critic of the film has enthusiastically thrashed her ever since (metaphorically, of course). I'm sure Sade himself would thoroughly appreciate the shame that's been heaped upon her. It's with this in mind that I join in the revels, pointing out, for instance, the sullen and disinterested expression she wears when told she must be searched bodily for Desroches's missing brooch. You'd think she was a hardened prison inmate going through the motions, where she ought to be a quivering wreck, humiliated beyond belief at the thought of being inspected in a room full of leering men. It's not even just a matter of unsuitability for sado-masochism. When the wicked Madame Dubois inveigles Justine in her prison escape plan and tells her to scream the place down at the allotted time, Power's performance has all the hysterical intensity of an Englishman hailing a cab. (It's worth noting that Romina Power was engaged at the time to Albano Carrisi, an Italian pop star with seven hit singles under his belt between 1967 and 1969. Power married him in 1970, two years after the Franco film was shot, and they began recording together. With the Albano/Powers relationship all over the gossip mags in 1968, it was probably the film's Italian co-producers who were keenest to get her into the production. Albano was also present on the set, which incensed Franco all the more: "He was taking pictures and he was a prick!"<sup>9</sup>).

**Music:** With the exception of the marvellous title music, wisely recycled for *Count Dracula* the following year, Bruno

Nicolai's score, heaving its musical bosom like something from a Joan Crawford flick, is a bit too treacly for my taste. If it's not labouring the romance it's hammering home slivers of misplaced whimsy. Embarrassing comedy music accompanies the lecherous Desroches spying on Justine as she inadvertently bares her bottom while performing her cleaning duties, while the revels of Madame Dubois the night before her supposed execution are scored to the kind of jolly olde English music that in my view would justify smashing cinema seats. It's far from the composer's finest work, but who cares: it pales into insignificance compared to his future work for Franco.

**Studios:** Filmed at Estudios Balcázar (Barcelona).

**Locations:** The prison where Justine meets Madame Dubois is the Castillo de Montjuich in Barcelona; Du Bressac's castle is the Palau Nacional in Sants-Montjuïc, Barcelona; the painter's house where Justine takes refuge is in the Güell Park in Barcelona; street scenes and the arrest of Justine take place in Plaça de Sant Felip Neri and Plaça del Rei, in the Ciutat Vella ('Old City') district. Studio filming took place at Barcelona's Estudios Balcázar.

**UK theatrical release:** *Justine* - under its UK release title *Justine and Juliet* - was granted an 'X' certificate by the BBFC on the 28 July 1971. Submitted with a running time of 115m, the film was cut considerably for theatrical release. By April of 1972 it was playing double bills at the Jacey sex cinema in Piccadilly, London, on a double bill with Malcolm Leigh's 45-minute short, *Erotic Fantasies* (1971). See Appendix for further details.

**Connections:** Donatien Alphonse François de Sade (1740-1814), best known as The Marquis de Sade, was a French aristocrat, philosopher, novelist and political essayist whose work transformed literature, contributed to the enlightenment's understanding of the human condition, and revolutionised the conception of human sexuality. In the course of his life he found himself violently at odds with Church, State and many of his contemporaries, spent long periods in prison, and in his private life committed acts of sexual cruelty with women in his employment, which helped to blur the line between his real life reputation and his writings. The history of *Justine*, his best known book, is complicated, as there are three quite different versions. It began as a novella called *Les Infortunes de la Vertu*, written by Sade in his cell at the Bastille during June and July 1787 but never published in his lifetime (it was eventually published in France in 1930). In July 1789 Sade was transferred from the Bastille to the asylum at Charenton, where he was incarcerated for nearly a year before being released in April 1790. At liberty again, he rewrote and greatly expanded *Les Infortunes de la Vertu*, turning it into *Justine, ou les Malheurs de la Vertu*, which was published anonymously in June 1791. A third version, *La Nouvelle Justine ou Les Malheurs de la Vertu*, was published in the Netherlands in a ten-volume edition between 1797 to 1801. This third variant changed the narrative voice from first-person to third-person, and expanded the story to include the diametrically opposed experiences of Justine's sister,



Juliette. (Franco's film appears to have been based mostly on the second version, although cutaways to the story of Juliette suggest his familiarity with the third.) In 1801 Sade was re-arrested; he spent the rest of his life in prison until his death in 1814.<sup>10</sup> ... In the most widely read variant, *Justine, ou les Malheurs de la Vertu*<sup>11</sup>, the story ends with Justine struck by lightning, an inversion of the religious expectation of vice struck down, and a logical culmination of the travails of virtue. Juliette then renounces her life of libertinage and heads off in a carriage to join the Carmelite nuns! It's an almost comically unsatisfying conclusion that feels blatantly tacked on, lasting as it does for just a page in a book of great expansiveness on other matters. Of course the prior intensity of lust, and the sustained exposition of philosophical argument, render Juliette's final renunciation utterly unconvincing. We must recall that Napoleon Bonaparte ordered the arrest of the anonymous author of *Justine*, and neither Sade nor his publisher were in any doubt that the book was incendiary. The last-minute reversal seems to have been a doomed attempt to fend off such attacks. In *La Nouvelle Justine* Sade took a very different approach. Told over ten volumes, the previously published storyline takes us to the end of Volume Four; Justine completes the recounting of her sorry tale, and then reclines in comfort at her sister's house, unmolested by lightning bolts, while Juliette offers her own story, told across the next six volumes. At the end of Volume Ten, we return to Justine, and an audience of Juliette's friends who have gathered to listen to the sisters' tales. Concluding, having heard both, that Justine and her adherence to virtue are contemptible, the group throw her out into the stormy night: "*Justine is shown the door; not only is she not given so much as a penny, she is sent forth stripped of the little that remained to her. Bewildered, humiliated by such ingratitude and so many abominations, but too content to escape what could have been worse still, the child of woe, murmuring thanks to God, totters past the château gates and down the lane leading to the high road ... Scarcely does she reach it when a flash of lightning breaks from the heavens, and she is struck down, smitten by a thunderbolt that pierces her through.*" Juliette's friends are jubilant ("*Come quickly, Madame, come contemplate heaven's handiwork, come see how the powers above reward piety and goodness.*") and it's here, in *La Nouvelle Justine*, that the long extended promise of the earlier "*Justine*" is satiated, in a final scene befitting the whole: "*Our four libertines surround the corpse; and although it has been horribly disfigured, frightful designs nevertheless shape themselves in libertine minds, the shattered vestiges of the defunct Justine become the object of lewd covetings. The infamous Juliette excites her friends as they snatch the clothes from the body [...] Unto her ashes they all four insult that girl, one by one; the execrable Juliette, watching them, frigs herself without pause; and finally the company retires, abandoning the corpse by the wayside.*" Thus are Sade's unrestrained feelings expressed regarding a fitting end for the woeful Justine!<sup>12</sup>

**Other versions:** Blue Underground's DVD, *Marquis de Sade: Justine*, is the definitive version, running 124 minutes. In addition

to George Cukor's aforementioned Lawrence Durrell adaptation of the same name, *Justine* is not to be confused with *Juliette de Sade* aka *Mademoiselle de Sade e i suoi vizi* (1969) by Warren Kiefer, an Italian/Swedish co-production distributed in the UK by Anthony Balch under the absurd title *Heterosexual* (a word that Balch must have reckoned so obscure that dumb British sex film audiences would believe it referred to some obscure form of kinkiness!). Nor is it to be mistaken for Sande N. Johnsen's black-and-white *Justine* (1967), an American sexploitation obscurity marketed with the tagline "The erotic excess of evil". And it is certainly not to be confused with AIP's 'biopic' *De Sade* (1969), directed by Cy Endfield and starring Keir Dullea, a film so tedious and ill-conceived that it makes Franco's look like a masterpiece.

**Problematica:** Some sources credit British actor Anthony Dawson as playing Brother Clément, however this role is played by Howard Vernon.

## THE CASTLE OF FU MANCHU

Spain, Italy, West Germany & UK 1968

Spanish depósito légal number: B-10742-1969

*Original theatrical titles in countries of origin*

**El castillo de Fu-Manchu** (SP)

**Die Folterkammer des Dr. Fu Man Chu** (GER)

*Alternative titles*

**Sax Rohmer's "The Castle of Fu Manchu"** (onscreen USA/UK)

**The Castle of Fu-Man-Chu** (onscreen US trailer/poster)

**Das Schloss der Gehenkten** (GER) (Sp.MC)

**Il castello di Fu-Manchu** (reported for unreleased IT version)

**Assignment Istanbul** (shooting title)

*Production companies*

**Producciones Cinematográficas Balcázar** (Barcelona)

**Tilma Films** (Barcelona)

**Italian International Film** (Rome)

**Terra Filmkunst GmbH** (Berlin)

**Towers of London** (London) [uncredited]

*Theatrical distributors*

**Mahier Films** (Barcelona)

**Constantin-Film** (Munich)

**International Cinema Corp.** (Los Angeles)

**Anglo-EMI Distributors Ltd** (London)

**MGM** [international sales]

Italy: none

*Timeline*

<b>Shooting date</b>	25 June-27 July	1968
<b>West German certificate</b>	28 April	1969
<b>UK 'A' certificate issued</b>	11 September	1970
<b>Jamaica (Kingston)</b>	24 September	1970
<b>UK</b>	December	1970
<b>Barcelona</b>	18 September	1972
<b>USA (Lubbock TX)</b>	19 November	1972
<b>Madrid</b>	28 May	1973
<b>Seville</b>	06 July	1974

*Theatrical running time*

<b>Spain</b>	92m
<b>West Germany</b>	85m
<b>UK</b>	92m07s
<b>USA</b>	87m

**Cast:** **Christopher Lee** (Fu Manchu). **Richard Greene** (Sir Dennis Nayland Smith). **José Manuel Martín** (Omar Pasha). **Günther Stoll** (Dr. Curt Kessler). **Tsai Chin** (Lin Tang). **Maria Perschy** (Dr. Ingrid Koch). **Rosalba Neri** (Lisa, Omar Pasha's favourite). **Gustavo Re** (Professor Herakles). **Werner Abrolat** (Melnik, informant). **Osvaldo Genazzani** (Sir Robert). **Howard Marion Crawford** (Doctor Ronald Petrie). *uncredited:* **Gene Reyes** (Fu Manchu's main henchman). **Jess Franco** (General Hamid, 'inspector'). **Mike Brendel** (Pasha henchman with machine gun). **Guillermo Méndez** (Pasha henchman with pipe). **Moisés Augusto [Jack] Rocha** (Fu Manchu henchman). **Burt Kwouk** (Feno - footage from *The Brides of Fu Manchu*).

**Credits:** director: **Jess Franco**. screenplay by **Harry Alan Towers** [as 'Peter Welbeck']. story & screenplay: **Manfred Barthel** [SP prints] / **Michael Haller** [GER prints add], based on characters created by **Sax Rohmer**. dialogue: **Jaime Jesús Balcázar** [SP prints]. director of photography: **Manuel Merino**. art director: **Santiago Ontañón**. supervising editor: **María Luisa Soriano**. editor: **John Colville** / **Herman Storr** [SP prints] / **Waltraut Lindenau** [GER prints]. music: **Malcolm Shelby** [SP prints] / music composed & conducted by **Charles Camilleri** [English-language prints] / **Gert Wilden** [GER prints]. producer: **Harry Alan Towers**. production supervisor: **Juan Estelrich**. production manager: **Remo Odevaine**. production assistants: **Gines Rodríguez**, **Bruno Leder**, **Lamberto Palmieri**. assistant directors: **Federico Canudas** [SP prints] / **Ricardo Franco** [English-language prints]. continuity: **Herminia Arnau**. set dresser: **Werner Preuss**. special effects: **Paul Schöler** [GER prints]. costumes: **Berence Sparano**. seamstress: **Maruja Soriano**. assistant seamstress: **Helga Lange**. make-up: **Adrian Jaramillo**. assistant make-up: **Peter Jonas**, **Ascension Hernández**. hair stylist: **Vicenta Salvador**. laboratory: **Fotofilm, S.A.E.** (Barcelona). sound re-recording: **Servicios de Sonido**

**Balcázar** (Barcelona). sound system: **Westrex Recording System** [SP prints]. dubbing editor: **Adrian McDonald**. dubbing mixer: **Tommy Myers**. *uncredited:* Italian producer: **Fulvio Lucisano**. colour by **Eastmancolor**.

**Synopsis:** *To demonstrate his mastery of the world, Fu Manchu devises a way to freeze the oceans using special crystals. He directs his device at a ship in the Caribbean, sinking it with an iceberg. However, he overloads the equipment and blows up his base in the process. Fu Manchu's arch enemy Nayland Smith is on holiday in Scotland with his good friend Dr Petrie when news of the disaster arrives, along with an order from the Home Secretary to return to London. Fu Manchu sets up a new base, taking over a castle belonging to a government official on the banks of the Bosphorus in Anatolia, Turkey. However, despite the offer of an alliance from powerful Turkish crime lord Omar Pasha, Fu Manchu immediately murders all but one of Omar's welcome party and steals Omar's lover, a dark-haired beauty called Lisa. Fu Manchu holds Professor Herakles, the inventor of the crystallisation process, prisoner in a dungeon. In England, a friend of Professor Herakles, Dr. Curt Kessler, and Ingrid his secretary, are abducted and brought to Fu Manchu's new residence hidden in coffins. The transportation is witnessed by Melnik, a local stool pigeon who tries to use the information to extort money from the authorities and Omar Pasha; Pasha offers to buy the information then immediately has Melnik killed. At Fu Manchu's base, Professor Herakles is seriously ill with heart problems; the unscrupulous supervillain blackmails Dr. Kessler and Ingrid to perform a transplant, using a healthy man to keep Herakles alive. Appalled, they refuse. Fu Manchu persuades them to comply by destroying a local dam with his special crystals, killing scores of men in the process. Nayland Smith, with the help of the Istanbul police, heads off to Anatolia and infiltrates Pasha's base; Pasha too is planning an attack on Fu Manchu to rescue his beloved Lisa. On the principle that my enemy's enemy is my friend, the two men decide to pool their resources and devise a plan to destroy Fu Manchu once and for all...*

**Production notes:** According to *Balcázar Producciones Cinematográficas: Más allá de Esplugas City*, a book about Barcelona's Balcázar Studios (where interiors for several Towers productions were shot), Franco finished *Justine* on a Saturday in June 1968 and began working on *The Castle of Fu Manchu* the following Monday.<sup>1</sup> "Our good landlady's a wee bit thrifty!" says Nayland Smith in an early scene, as he surveys a disappointing picnic hamper; the line could be a bitter joke from Franco about the diminishing resources offered to him by Harry Alan Towers on this, the cheapest-looking of their films together...

**Review:** Often decried as the worst of the Fu Manchu films, *The Castle of Fu Manchu* stands up quite well if watched with a sense of humour, thanks to a pulpy plot and some irresistible Francoesque absurdities. As long as you bring to it the expectations appropriate to a cheap and cheerful low budget production rather than a 'prestige B-movie' it offers plenty of camp amusement.

Among Franco fans, debate usually rages (if that's not too strong a word) as to whether *The Castle of Fu Manchu* or *The Blood of Fu Manchu* is the better film. My vote goes to this one. Firstly, both hero and villain get more screen time; Richard Greene's Nayland Smith is sidelined for much of *The Blood of Fu Manchu*, whereas here he's a central character fighting from beginning to end. We also, and this is essential, see more of Christopher Lee. Let's face it, there is no more essential a reason to watch a Fu Manchu film than to witness Lee in action. Stoical and one-note though the character may be (more so even than Dracula, who at least veers between courtesy and savagery) Lee is still a genuine star, and Franco doesn't get to work with the giants very often. This is the third of six films the two men would make together, so they were evidently getting along famously, with disagreements over sexually explicit reshoots still months ahead of them.

The plot is more interesting too. Call me a sociopath, but I prefer a super-villain who threatens entire cities, rather than picking off victims one by one. Nayland Smith, examining a map of the world at police headquarters, and realising that Fu Manchu's method this time involves freezing the oceans, points to a handful of 'obvious' bases from where the villain may be operating; of the four he chooses, one is Istanbul. I find it hard to see how anyone could create a list of only four possible bases for effective freezing of oceans (in the prologue Fu Manchu has already achieved admirable results in the Caribbean), but let's not quibble about details; it turns out that our hero is bang on target. Fu Manchu is indeed on his way to Istanbul, heading inland from there to Anatolia, Eastern Turkey, where he glides in and commandeers a gorgeous palatial residence from a quivering government official. The building has some curious architectural ambiguities, which we can discuss in the 'Locations' section, but for now we're definitely in Turkey, okay? Good, that's settled.

Among the other plot devices – 'conveniences' or 'absurdities' if you like – that Towers's script bequeaths to Franco, my favourite is the treatment of opium. Already considered a source of evil by bourgeois society, in *The Castle of Fu Manchu* it not only addles the brains of poverty-stricken drug addicts and Romantic poets, it can also be transformed into a crystalline variant which, when added to water, creates a chain reaction of ice! Which is why Fu Manchu wants control of the opium trade; nothing so banal (nor so racially controversial) as the ruination of the West through rampant drug addiction. Small doses can also induce suspended animation in human subjects. Clearly the commercial prospects are endless – never mind world conquest, why doesn't Fu Manchu just float his product on the stock market? Helpfully, the castle of the Turkish official taken over by Fu Manchu contains, we're told, Turkey's biggest stash of opium (this implication that the Turkish government stockpiles opium may be Franco's heaviest political statement so far). But this is not a serious film in any way: its only value lies in its ever-growing pile of nonsense currency. For instance, secrecy among the villainous is right out of fashion:

Fu Manchu's hooded lackeys, bearing scimitars and wearing black silk robes, carry the frozen Kessler and Ingrid in wooden coffins into a Turkish township in broad daylight, as if seeking a prize for 'Most Suspicious New Arrival of the Year'. Said coffins are then conveyed across the Bosphorus in rowing boats, conspicuously in broad daylight, while a tourist steamer chugs merrily by in the background. Plausibility has been hijacked and stuffed in a crate somewhere; at one point, Kessler and Ingrid make their escape from a dungeon by throwing acid at the iron lock (crazy but it just might work), before stopping in the doorway for a passionate kiss with clouds of toxic fumes enveloping them. Certain scenes suggest Franco's craving for the trappings of horror; when the bodies of Kessler and Ingrid arrive at Fu Manchu's lair, their coffins are deposited beside the bed of their sick friend Professor Herakles. Sprayed with some kind of thawing device (okay, a fire extinguisher) Kessler 'rises from the dead', a scene which Franco shoots as though it's Christopher Lee clambering out of the grave. Maybe Lee had agreed to star in *Count Dracula* over a glass of Rioja that very lunchtime, and Jess couldn't wait to get started?

Time was running out for the Fu Manchu franchise, a fact which Fu Manchu himself seems to intuit in *Castle*. Throughout the film he drives his experiments to disaster through excessive haste, suggesting a self-destructive undercurrent to the character that's quite intriguing, and could have been teased out more rewardingly had anyone stopped to think about it. "Even Nayland Smith cannot reach you now, father," says ever-loving daughter Lin Tang as they contemplate imminent victory. "I wish that he would try" is Fu Manchu's curious response. It's as though the villain is pining for his nemesis. But of course, no one at the time of shooting knew for sure that this *was* to be the last 'serious' Fu Manchu film; such moments are just spooky coincidences, accruing around a venerable movie icon about to meet, if not his doom, then certainly a major hiatus. After 1968 the character was frozen for twelve years, as effectively as his opium-crystallised victims, until the semi-spoof Peter Sellers version, 1980's *The Fiendish Plot of Dr. Fu Manchu* (co-produced by Hugh Hefner – a big step up from sleazy Harry Towers, right?). The world would indeed 'hear from him again' but next time with a very different timbre...

**Franco on screen:** Franco plays General Hamid, a lazy, ineffectual police inspector who can barely rouse himself from lethargy long enough to comprehend that there's an international super-criminal on his patch.

**Cast and crew:** Howard Marion Crawford reprises for the last time his role as Doctor Petrie, having appeared in all five of Towers' Fu Manchu films. In a long and varied career he was one of the earliest Dr. Watsons, co-starring in the US-financed *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1954-1955) alongside Ronald Howard as Holmes, and just prior to his first Franco film, *The Blood of Fu Manchu*, he'd played in two top-notch Emma Peel episodes of *The Avengers*; 'What the Butler Saw' (1966) and 'The Living Dead' (1967). After *The Castle of Fu Manchu* he went on to appear in a third *Avengers*





Die  
**Folterkammer**  
des **DR. FU**  
**MAN CHU**





episode, the decidedly peculiar Tara King tale 'Stay Tuned' (shot in December 1968) before dying of a heart attack in November 1969.

**Music:** Charles Camilleri gets credit on the English language print, while 'Malcomb Shelby' is named on the Spanish print. Neither had a career prominent enough to gauge the style of their work, although Camilleri seems the more likely candidate, having scored *House of a Thousand Dolls* for Towers the year before.

**Studios:** Estudios Balcázar (Barcelona).

**Locations:** Okay, okay! Fu Manchu's palace in Turkey is actually the famous Güell Park in Barcelona, designed by Antoni Gaudí! Yes, it is a bit like pointing a camera at the Post Office Tower and claiming it's a secret military base in Guadalupe. We can all laugh about it now, but in 1969 what percentage of US or UK viewers, or indeed viewers anywhere outside Spain, could spot this Barcelona landmark and swear it wasn't some mad Turkish palace? I'd guess fewer than 1%. Franco evidently decided that since the film was so cheap it needed some extra 'oomph' onscreen, and chose the most dramatic location within range of Balcázar Studios.

**UK theatrical release:** *The Castle of Fu Manchu* is the only Jess Franco movie to get through the BBFC without cuts, receiving an uncontroversial 'A' certificate in September 1970.

**Connections:** Early scenes depicting Fu Manchu's ocean-freezing machine are lifted directly from the 1966 Don Sharp film *The Brides of Fu Manchu*, which is a little outrageous, especially as they run for several minutes, feature a memorable and distinctive set, and simply re-dub Christopher Lee and Tsai Chin to suit the current film's needs! But look at it this way: at least Burt Kwouk (Cato from the *Pink Panther* films) has now appeared in a Franco film, even if he never knew it. The inclusion of blue-tinted footage from Roy Ward Baker's esteemed film about the sinking of the Titanic, *A Night to Remember* (1958), is less easy to justify, although it's not the first time black and white footage has been spliced into a colour Franco film (see *Kiss Me Monster*), nor would it be the last (see *Revenge in the House of Usher*).

**Other versions:** A comparison with the Spanish version reveals that Blue Underground's DVD trims a considerable amount of picture from top and bottom. A few names are altered, but basically the Spanish and English versions are identical scene for scene. Incidentally, although the film reputedly had Italian money in it, there seems not to have been an Italian version released. I can find no poster or stills for *Il castello di Fu-Manchu*; was it prepared and then rejected, or did it never really have Italian financing?

**Problematica:** Maria Perschy is credited on English-language prints as 'Marie' however the English dubbing names her character as Dr. Ingrid Koch. Prolific Spanish featured player Moisés Augusto Rocha can be identified clearly in stills but is not visible in release prints. Some sources claim that German actor Herbert Fux plays the governor of Anatolia however this is not the case. Similarly Jess Franco's nephew (and future director) Ricardo Franco is said to play one of Fu Manchu's henchmen but we are unable to confirm this. *Obsession* adds the following unconfirmed

credits: co-executive producer Francisco Romero; co-screenplay Vinicio Marinucci.

**Press coverage:** *Cinefantastique* declared that "*Christopher Lee is once again a perfect picture of elegance and evil as the famed Oriental super-villain, but the production [...] is strictly el cheapo and truly lacklustre in its execution of the, by now, routine plot elements.*"<sup>72</sup>

## VENUS IN FURS

**West Germany, Italy & USA [& UK] 1968**

Italian visa number: 54342

*Original theatrical title in country of origin*

**Paroxismus ...può una morta rivivere per amore?...**

*Alternative titles*

**Paroxismus** (IT poster)

**Paroxismus erotico** (alt IT poster)

**Black Angel** (shooting title)

*Production companies*

**Terra-Filmkunst GmbH** (Berlin)

**Cineproduzioni Associate** (Rome)

**Commonwealth United Productions, Inc.** (Los Angeles)

**Towers of London** (London) [uncredited]

*Theatrical distributors*

**Filmar** (Rome)

**Commonwealth United thru AIP** (Los Angeles)

**Cinecenta Film Distributors** (London)

*Timeline*

Announced forthcoming in <i>Variety</i>	31 July	1968
Shooting date	from 1 October	1968
Italian visa issued	09 August	1969
Italy (source: <i>Gramesi</i> )	19 August	1969
Italy (Novi Ligure) (source: <i>La Stampa</i> )	29 October	1969
Rejected by the UK BBFC	13 January	1970
USA (Anderson, IN)	27 March	1970
USA - L.A. press screening	30 April	1970
Reviewed by <i>Variety</i> , USA	06 May	1970
USA (Los Angeles)	30 September	1970
UK	May	1972

*Theatrical running time*

West Germany	96m
Italy	92m
USA	86m
UK	90m



**Cast:** **James Darren** (Jimmy Logan). **Barbara McNair** (Rita, nightclub singer). **Maria Röhm** (Wanda Reed, the Venus in Furs). **Klaus Kinski** (Ahmed Kortobawi, playboy). **Dennis Price** (Percival Kapp, art dealer). **Margaret Lee** (Olga, fashion photographer). **Paul Müller** (Hermann). **Adolfo Lastretti** (Inspector Kaplan). **Mirella Pamphili** (woman cleaning mirror in Istanbul apartment). *uncredited:* **Manfred Mann** (jazz pianist). **Jess Franco** (jazz trombonist).

**Credits:** directed by **Jess Franco**. from a story by **Jess Franco** / **Bruno Leder** [IT prints]. screenplay by **Jess Franco** & **Malvin Wald** / **Carlo Fadda** & **Milo G. Cuccia** [IT prints]. dialogue by **Guido Leoni** [IT prints]. director of photography: **Angelo Lotti**. film editors: **Henry Batista**, **Mike Pozen**, **Nicholas Wentworth** / **Bruno Mattei** [IT prints]. art director: **Giorgio Postiglione**. music by **Manfred Mann** & **Mike Hugg** [IT prints]. produced by **Harry Alan Towers**. production supervisor: **Fritz Hammer** [IT prints]. unit manager: **Federico Tofi** [IT prints]. camera operator: **Sergio Martinelli** [IT prints]. make-up: **Giovanni Morosi** [IT prints]. music supervision: **Synchrofilm, Inc.** [Igo Kantor]. post production supervision: **Robert S. Eisen** & **Harry Eisen**. colour: **Eastmancolor** by **Boschi** (Rome) [IT prints]. titles and special effects: **Howard A. Anderson Co.**. sound: **Elio Pacella** [IT prints]. sound re-recording: **Fono Roma** [IT prints]. dubbing recorded with the collaboration of **S.A.S. - Società Attori Sincronizzatori** [IT prints]. *uncredited:* Italian producer: **Alexander Hacoheh**. **Manfred Mann** songs performed by **Barbara McNair**. Commonwealth United European production executive: **Steve Previn**.

**Note:** Italian prints mis-credit German sex comedy specialist **Hans Billian** as director. Billian was assistant director on *Il momento di uccidere* (1968), a Spaghetti Western by Giuliano Carnimeo which was co-produced by Terra-Filmkunst (Berlin), who also co-produced *Venus in Furs*.

**Synopsis:** *A beach near Istanbul. Wandering aimlessly along the shoreline, jazz musician Jimmy Logan finds a body washed up by the tide. To his consternation, he recognises the mutilated female corpse as Wanda, a beautiful young woman he once saw being raped and killed during an S&M party... Her killers were a millionaire playboy called Ahmed, an art dealer named Kapp and Olga, a fashion photographer ... As present and past become hazy, Jimmy flees to Rio de Janeiro after witnessing the murder, and takes refuge in a steady but lifeless relationship with Rita, a nightclub singer. His fragile stability is shattered when Wanda turns up in Rio at a concert he is playing, after which events slide ambiguously between memories of the past and situations of the present. Wanda seduces Jimmy and the two become lovers, which is the last nail in the coffin of Jimmy's affair with Rita. Meanwhile Wanda is hunting down and killing first Kapp, then Olga and then Ahmed. In each case she seduces them and then drains the life of her onetime torturers. If Wanda is an avenging femme fatale, what are her plans for Jimmy?*

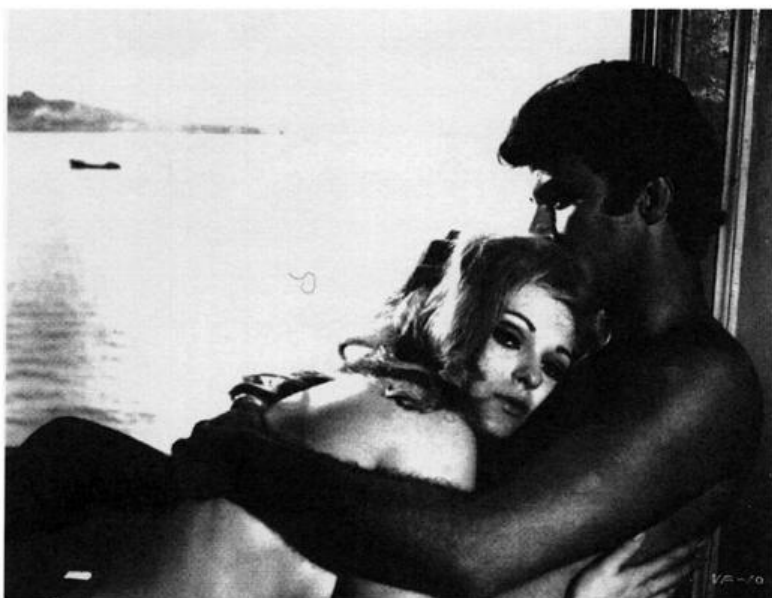
**Review:** Now this is more like it. After a run of compromised or insubstantial projects, *Venus in Furs* is an icy, shimmering jewel of a film, in which photography, music, editing and art design coalesce into scene after scene of morbid mysterious beauty. Based on a story of Franco's own creation, and originally to have been called 'Black Angel', the film was eventually released under the misleading moniker *Venus in Furs*, under which title it was widely distributed theatrically and on videotape in the USA. It's one of Franco's better known films and has accumulated a fair amount of respect over the years, helping to balance the damage done to his reputation by some of his over-exposed lesser works. Not everyone can be wooed by the film's loopy asymmetry and hard-to-follow plot – the psychedelic elements (more on those later) provide bait for the curious, but the meat of the film is the marriage between Franco's moody sado-eroticism and the delirious currents swirling around the coldly beautiful Maria Röhm, playing a vengeful spirit called Wanda. Add to this an eerie magisterial score by Manfred Mann and you have one of Franco's most spell-binding films.

*Venus in Furs* invokes a nebulous dream-world of confused and decadent characters, whose high-society anomie leads them from rape and murder to fear and despair. Three libertines, responsible for the S&M murder of a beautiful young woman called Wanda, fall prey to a supernatural guilt-trip as the victim returns from the grave, a cool, detached, unknowable seductress, luring them to destruction. Dressed only in a luxurious mink coat, panties and stockings, the spirit of Wanda is part sensual, part reproachful, and implacably fatal. Franco's deep appreciation of jazz governs the plot, as linear narrative is replaced by loose improvisation and circling variations on a theme. Some of this improvisation is born of necessity; there was evidently less money available than would have been ideal (for instance, footage of the Rio Carnival is repeatedly used as padding). However, in a film so cyclical, so oneiric, so obsessed with the repetition of haunting images, such deficiencies are easily forgiven.

*Venus in Furs* has for many years been available only in its US release version from Commonwealth United, complete with added voice-over and psychedelic optical effects that were not a part of Franco's preferred cut. Narrative ellipses, temporal oddities and shifts in the film's geography were also created by AIP's editors, meaning that the film Franco lovers know so well is in fact an amalgam of his vision and the creative decisions taken by a team of Americans: writer Malvin Wald, editors Henry Batista and Mike Pozen, and post-production supervisors Robert and Harry Eisen. We'll consider them in more detail later (and we'll also take a look at the rare Italian version, which is strikingly different). For now, it's important to point out that, for all its beauty, *Venus in Furs* is not a pure statement of Franco's creativity but something more akin to a collaboration...

After the credits, and some brief establishing shots of Istanbul, we cut to a man's hands pressed against a windowpane, through which we see only sky. Ominous music shudders in the background.







The hands look as though they're reaching for something, trapped against an invisible barrier. They curl into fists and beat impotently at the glass. The sky remains empty save for a single bird wheeling in the distance. Thus *Venus in Furs* draws us inexorably into contemplation of the ineffable, the unattainable, the mysterious ...

A musician called Jimmy finds the corpse of a woman washed up on the beach, and recognises her as Wanda, someone he saw, some time ago, being whipped and tortured at a high society party. The flashback reveals that Jimmy witnessed her torture but walked away, assuming that everything was consensual. The first time we step outside of rational storytelling is after this flashback: returning to the beach we see Wanda's dead face, and a bird wheeling in the sky. At this point, in a naturalistic narrative, Jimmy would have informed the police about the body, or at least tried to talk to a friend (see 'Other versions'). Instead we crossfade from a shot of the bird to Jimmy alone on the beach, playing his trumpet, with no sign of Wanda's corpse. Jimmy's voice-over takes up the slack: "I don't remember if it was last week, or last month, or last year. All I remember is escaping from somebody, or something. Was it Wanda? [...] I didn't just leave Istanbul; I escaped [...] Funny thing - I ended up in the one place where people go on the lam to hide. Rio..."

This remark presents the first ambiguity in the film's timeline: is Jimmy talking about fleeing Istanbul after seeing Wanda being tortured, or after finding her corpse on the beach? The following scenes are set in Rio, with Jimmy's new girlfriend Rita, a nightclub singer. In voice-over he says he's spoken to Rita about "what happened in Istanbul", but that still doesn't clarify things. The next ellipse is even more confusing; Rita has helped Jimmy back on his feet, he's playing trumpet in a nightclub. His fellow musicians are the same bunch who played at the Istanbul party where Wanda was killed (including Jess Franco on trombone). But strangely, despite this being Rio, not Istanbul, they're playing in the same room, on the same stage, as they were the night Wanda was killed. There's the same red wallpaper; the same gilt-framed painting; even the same shot of Jimmy stepping down off the stage. How can this be? Wanda herself appears in the audience, much to Jimmy's astonishment, and again the voice-over tries to paper over the cracks: "Was this Wanda? She was dead! I found her body on a beach in Istanbul." So now we know that Jimmy fled to Rio after pulling Wanda's corpse from the sea. His earlier voice-over - "Maybe I split because I was just as sick as they were but couldn't face up to it" - also explains why he ran away instead of calling the authorities. He feels guilty for being aroused by what he saw, and for not intervening. It's the line that reveals most about what's going on in the film. I wish James Darren had communicated this with his facial reactions, rather than confessing it in voice-over, but at least it clarifies something that could otherwise have been lost: this is a film about guilt.

But who is the guilty party? It's as if we're seeing Franco struggle with the after-effects of his journey into the mind of the Marquis de Sade; as if the lascivious enjoyment of abused innocence in *Justine* has come back to haunt him. *Venus in Furs* asks what it

would be like to be haunted by the ghost of someone you'd fucked and tortured to the grave. Franco is interrogating Sade's amorality here, and by extension, his own. Jimmy is punishing himself for his suppressed sadism, the three killers are being punished by the spirit of Wanda, and perhaps the director is indulging if not in self-punishment then self-criticism too. The melancholy that follows eroticism like a shadow in his work tells its own story; for many of Franco's characters, once the adrenalin of violence and depravity has abated there is nothing but loneliness, bitterness and death.

When Wanda appears in Rio she could either be a living double, of the sort beloved by giallo film scriptwriters, or a ghost, haunting Jimmy just as she will all those who played a part in her death. However, as Jimmy follows her through a garden she passes through a doorway, and in voice-over implores, "No Jimmy. Go back". He ignores her, and suddenly they're making love. We can see by their bodily entanglement that this was a physical encounter; if Wanda is a ghost, she's strikingly corporeal, which lays the groundwork for a third explanation, of which more later...

So what of the killers themselves? Of the three it is Kapp, played by Dennis Price, who gets the most powerfully hypnotic death scene. Wanda appears in his bedroom, tantalising him by slipping seamlessly from an apparently physical presence on his bed to a series of tauntingly arousing reflections in the mirrors on his bedroom wall. Her unattainable image drives him to a frenzy, culminating in a final agonised orgasm of frustration which destroys him. All of this is achieved without dialogue, and is driven instead by brilliant editing, luscious photography, and the strangulating intensity of Manfred Mann's breathtaking music. The entire sequence shows Franco at his most creative and technically accomplished, casting a sinister erotic spell and timing it to perfection.

Olga's death, like Kapp's, involves images, this time of the photographic variety. We see her setting up a rostrum camera to photograph a macabre painting of a corpse-like face, and examining a strip of photo negatives, when Wanda appears in her doorway. Using this as an excuse for lots of great shots in which Olga looks directly at us through viewfinders and various photographic appliances, the ensuing photo-session, with Wanda playing along as a model, will recur through many later Franco works (see *Eugenie* and *Sinner: the Secret Diary of a Nymphomaniac*). But Olga's heart is heavy, and when Wanda shows her true face she can take it no longer. Olga's slow suicide in blue-tinted bath-water (trickles of red from her gouged wrists seep over her breasts, mingling with the water) achieves a sombre funereal beauty, and her melancholic last words are beautifully conveyed, emphasising once again that this is a tale of gnawing, merciless guilt: "I wanted so hard to explain, what was in my heart, and feelings, when we did those awful things. Please forgive me..." Olga is a sadist afflicted with a conscience; an unfortunate psychological combination...

The revenge set-pieces are edited into the surrounding story with little or no connective tissue. Such is the structure of the film that there's no need. Dropped in wherever Franco wants them,

they float free, islands of focus and co-ordination amid dreaminess (and, to be honest, occasional dreariness). The third set-piece is the weakest in conceptual terms, although it's very well acted and photographed. It begins promisingly, as Klaus Kinski's Ahmed awaits Wanda's arrival. When she appears, he refers to her murder as an act they performed 'together'. Here, then, is a true sadist who regards the victim as participant in a sort of rite, creating a mystical bond that opens the door to death; leaving, of course, only one 'participant' alive to enjoy the view. He even has his own death worked out in advance: he recounts the story of a Sultan who, vexed by a slave girl who despised him, offered for twenty-four hours to reverse their roles. She would be the master, and he the slave. Wanda partakes in this charade, and we see her dressed as an Arab concubine, using her twenty-four hours to make love to another man while the trussed and horny 'Sultan' can but watch. And yet one is left, in this case, with a feeling of repetition carried over from Kapp's death. Ahmed's death by erotic frustration is too similar, yet it lacks the same malevolent power. That being said, Kinski puts everything into the role, and the close-ups of his strained, staring features are almost enough to make the sequence work. Perhaps he should have been castrated at the end of Wanda's twenty-four hour tease? This would certainly have 'capped' the death of Kapp, and delivered violent symmetry too – after all, Wanda died from knife wounds inflicted by Ahmed.

Jimmy's half-hearted relationship with nightclub singer and all-round nice girl Rita slows the pace too much, and Rita's resignation in the face of Jimmy's obsession with Wanda makes her ineffectual and uninteresting. It's a shame, because with a few extra lines of dialogue and a gloves-off argument between the two lovers, she could have earned her place. God knows Barbara McNair had it in her; just watch her belting out the final theme tune! "Well, if he's free, then so am I" Rita says, when it dawns on her that Jimmy's screwing Wanda. It's the eternal struggle between promiscuity and monogamy, and such was the prevailing angst regarding open relationships and the so-called permissive society that Franco would still be wrestling with this in 1980, in the beautiful but pessimistic *Abberaciones de una mujer casada*. Monogamy exerts a powerful hold over the heterosexual imagination; whether a meme invented by possessive men, or possessive women, or an instinct derived from hormones, it's more powerful than any ghost. When Jimmy sees Wanda kissing Olga at a party he reacts with fury, throwing Olga across the room and dragging Wanda away by her elbow (just as Bill did to Lorna in *Succubus*). It seems it's all right for Jimmy to two-time Rita, and rub her nose in it too, but not so cool for Wanda to smooch with someone else. Franco, however, sets the scene up in a slightly more ambivalent fashion by having Jimmy react this way because the 'other' was a woman. Perhaps bisexuality upsets him more than promiscuity? However it's Rita's jealousy that finally ends their relationship; she can't stand sharing Jimmy, despite having embarked on what was supposed to be a no-strings affair. Her departure, carrying a suitcase and gazing in

sorrow at her sleeping lover, ought to be heartbreaking, and yes it tweaks the edge of emotion, thanks to McNair's sincerity, but overall it fails because we've never really believed in their love; it's all a bit too weak and wet.

Normality of a kind impinges fifteen minutes from the end, with the abrupt arrival of a police inspector (Adolfo Lastretti) called in, one presumes, by the Italian co-producers. The inspector is seeking Wanda Reed, who's been implicated in murders in Istanbul and Rio. Jimmy runs upstairs, supposedly to fetch Wanda and prove that there must have been some mistake; instead he persuades her to get dressed and go on the run with him. There follows a car chase (in the context of *Venus in Furs* so out of place it almost counts as surrealism) fetching up for no apparent reason at a graveyard. Wanda runs into it and Jimmy follows, and it's here that the US post-production team really go to work, blitzing the screen with colour filters, slow motion, rippling effects and solarisation. Normality is left in the dust along with the never-seen-again cops, as Jimmy roams the cemetery, lost in a mélange of visual effects. At last the optical overlays recede, and we enter a bare red-walled room, inside which is Wanda, lying motionless on the floor. Her three killers, apparently revived, stand silently against the walls. In the corner some sort of Turkish holy man chants silently. This utterly dreamlike scene, shot upwards from floor level, ends with Ahmed walking over to examine Wanda, bending down into the wide-angle lens – at which we cut back to the beach near Istanbul, where Jimmy is once again banging his fists against the glass and roaming the water's edge, caught in a perceptual hall-of-mirrors from which there is no escape...

The strongest passages of *Venus in Furs* possess an assured fluidity revealing the essence of Franco's mature style. And yet, jewel though it is, flaws should be noted. For a start, the voice-over is a significant problem. Lines like "I was trapped in a whirlpool that kept dragging me in deeper and deeper," or "The real world had suddenly vanished, and I was hypnotised" are well-meaning attempts to convey the implications of Franco's images, but they're gauche and unnecessary. If only we could see this cut *without* Jimmy's faux-beatnik voice-overs (see 'Other versions'), I'm sure it would be greatly improved. The last line in particular over-eggs a vital image in a way that can leave casual viewers guffawing. On the other hand, the would-be hipsterism contributes some unintentional humour, particularly Jimmy's remark about the murderous S&M orgy: "Man, it was a wild scene... but if they wanted to go that rough, it was their bag!". The *New York Times* reviewer's sniffy accusation of "inept fancy moviemaking" (see "Press Coverage") is only apropos for a few scenes, one of which is the lovemaking between Jimmy and Wanda, which intercuts their clinch with the portraits of children and sombre-looking adults adorning the walls. These cutaways are empty signifiers that serve no purpose except to make things feel vaguely 'weird'. They're cheap and tacky and the film doesn't need them. Franco did the same thing in *Succubus*, and he'd do it again; using random artworks (paintings, book-covers, posters) found at

a location to adorn or dislocate a scene. It's annoying here because the content has no real resonance. The carnival footage is another encumbrance, although at first it shows how Jimmy's obsession with Wanda isolates him from even the most vivid of surroundings. But it's easy to put aside the elements that don't work. There are orchestrations of macabre beauty here as memorable and moving as anything in Franco's career. A lonely song on the shoreline of pure cinema, told in the visual language of dreams, *Venus in Furs* is one of Jess Franco's most engaging and memorable films.

**Franco on screen:** Franco appears as the trombonist with Jimmy's jazz quartet in the Istanbul club scene and one of the Rio gigs, and he's playing the piano at Hermann's party.

**Cast and crew:** James Darren may be a little out of his depth here, though perhaps we should be glad that Franco's first choice of leading man, Roddy McDowall, was not available. Darren's role in the TV series *Time Tunnel* is quite apt, given the time travelling psychedelic feel of the film ... "*Rita and I worked for Hermann, whose parties never stopped*" says Jimmy, introducing the character played by Swiss actor Paul Müller, soon to become of inestimable value to the director's repertory cast in the 1970s ... Margaret Lee was in demand in Italy at the time, having worked for Lucio Fulci, Lina Wertmüller and Claude Chabrol. By 1968 she'd already been drawn into Harry Alan Towers's productions; *Venus in Furs* was the third, followed by roles in *The Bloody Judge* and the film Franco might have made had he not fallen out with Towers, *Dorian Gray* (dir: Massimo Dallamano, 1970).

Of the three American editors, Henry Batista was an industry stalwart who made the move to television in 1955 and worked there almost exclusively afterwards. Mike Pozen was perhaps a shade more 'hip', having recently cut Bob Rafelson's delirious *Head* (1968) as well as 22 episodes of TV series *The Monkees*. Nicholas Wentworth was also the editor of Franco's *Justine*, so it's likely that he was the editor initially assigned to the film by Towers ... Post-production supervisors Robert and Harry Eisen operated in the US, with Robert editing picture and Harry editing music.

**Music:** From the moment that Jimmy sees a woman's body washed up on the shore near Istanbul, Manfred Mann and Mike Hugg's phenomenal score draws the viewer deep beneath the waves of Franco's dream-world. A mesmerising theme for electric piano, synthesiser, sax, double bass and drums weaves as eerie a spell as anything I've heard in the movies. It floats in a tidal lagoon between musical idioms; an eruption of jazz, a splash of psychedelia, the spray of something from beyond, as if the tune is floating to us down the currents of time, with the electric piano mimicking a harpsichord, like fantastical chamber music reverberating from another century. Franco (or the music editors) create further disorientation by layering two completely different pieces of music on top of each other; for instance, when Wanda first appears at the party where Jimmy's band are playing, the laid-back jazz they're cranking out is cross-faded with an indefinable cue for electronics, strings and celeste. Manfred Mann himself can be

seen playing electric piano for Rita's group during the song *Let's Get Together*, and with James Darren and Jess Franco's band in Rio too, although we get our closest look at him around the 58 minute mark, when he leads the band through an uptempo jazz number ... Barbara McNair sings the vocal numbers, pulling out the stops for the end credits when she performs the title song with gusto. McNair, one of the foremost black women on American TV, was in great demand at the time; she'd just come off *The Barbara McNair and Duke Ellington Special* (February 1968) in which she sang Ellington's songs while he played piano. She went on to become a regular fixture on shows with Ed Sullivan, Tom Jones, David Frost, Dean Martin and Carol Burnett, and from 1969-1971 hosted *The Barbara McNair Show* for Motown Television Productions.

**Studios:** Filmed at Estudios Balcázar (Barcelona) and A.T.C. (Grottaferrata, Rome).

**Locations:** Shot in Rome, Marbella (Spain), Barcelona and Istanbul. Certain shots in Istanbul look similar to those in *Residencia para espías* but they're actually new, despite in some cases being shot from almost exactly the same angles. Party scenes were shot in Rome at the one-time villa of Italian producer Carlo Ponti, whose ex-wife had just won it from him in a divorce settlement and was hiring it out cheaply for film shoots.

**UK theatrical release:** *Venus in Furs* was rejected by the BBFC on the 4th of May 1970. Confusion abounds on the subject, however, due to London-based distributors Cinecenta releasing a film called *Venus in Furs* on a double bill with *99 Women* in the summer of 1972. *Continental Film Review* lists the two on release together at the Piccadilly Centa (formerly the Jacey) in May '72, and at a sex cinema in Dalston, East London, in July. However, Cinecenta actually released a different *Venus in Furs*, directed by Italian Massimo Dallamano! See Appendix for details.

**Connections:** Fans of Leopold Von Sacher-Masoch's novel *Venus in Furs* will be disappointed to discover that this movie has virtually nothing in common with it. The seed for the film came instead from a conversation Franco once had with jazz legend Chet Baker. Speaking to Franco one evening in a French nightclub, Baker described his sensation of floating away from reality into fantasy during his trumpet solos, as if astrally travelling, only to open his eyes and come down to earth with a bump in the same half-empty dive as before ... The title *Venus in Furs* was imposed on Franco by the distributor, instead of his own preference, 'Black Angel'. Franco says that the hero was originally meant to be black, with Röhm as the object of his desire; unfortunately the American producers nixed this idea as racially unacceptable, although a white man making love to a black woman was deemed okay, hence Jimmy's relationship with Rita. Resigning himself to the changes, Franco added scenes with Röhm walking nude down a flight of stairs dragging a fur coat behind her to try and justify the new title. Incidentally, 'The Black Angel' by Cornell Woolrich, filmed by Roy William Neill in 1946, shares nothing with the Franco film, save for a murdered woman and a prolonged flashback in which the image



is rippled by post-production optical effects. However it would have made an excellent project for Franco: Catherine, whose husband has been convicted of murdering a young woman, and Martin, an alcoholic pianist and husband of the murder victim, team up to clear the accused's name. Their investigation leads them to a shifty nightclub owner whom they suspect may be the real killer ... *Venus in Furs* recycles a key element from *The Diabolical Dr. Z*: an eerie blonde stalking her three enemies and murdering them one by one ... The striking Italian poster art was by the acclaimed commercial artist Valérie de Berardinis ... The society party at which Jimmy remembers first seeing Wanda is populated by guests standing unnaturally still as if frozen in time, recalling Alain Resnais & Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Last Year at Marienbad* (1960) ... During Jimmy's description of getting lost in the Carnival with Wanda, Franco recycles a shot from *La ciudad sin hombres*, showing the sun rising and roadsweepers cleaning up after the night's revels ... The film ends with a quote from the metaphysical poet John Donne's *Holy Sonnet* - "I runne to death, and death meets me as fast, And all my pleasures are like yesterday" - a rumination on the fear of dying and its shadow of desire that speaks for the otherwise nameless currents of dread and mystery in the film.

**Other versions:** The film that we know as *Venus in Furs* is radically different to Franco's original conception. In 1970, eighteen months after it was shot, the film's American co-producers Commonwealth United took hold of the material and gave it a psychedelic makeover, using copious optical effects and a histrionic narration from James Darren. (This narration, with its mash-up of hippy and beatnik clichés, was written by Hollywood legend Malvin Wald, creator of the smash hit TV series *Naked City*, who took time out from his busy schedule on children's TV hit *Daktari* to supervise the rewriting and dubbing.) In interviews many years later, Franco declared himself unhappy with these changes, and although I personally enjoy the US version I can understand his dismay.<sup>1</sup>

For many years, the American version of *Venus in Furs* was the only one available on any home entertainment format. However, thanks to a TV transmission of the Italian variant *Paroxismus* ... *può una morta rivivere per amore?*... by TVR Teleitalia, we can now see another, although even this presents problems; there are glaring and copious omissions of Franco-shot material, and to make matters worse it too labours under psychedelic 'enhancements' to the footage. The project that began life as 'Black Angel' could really have done with a *guardian angel* to protect it from interference!

Unfortunately it's impossible to decipher from the available materials the extent to which the Italian version represents Franco's preferred storyline. For instance, *Paroxismus* avoids much of the elliptical confusion of time and place which runs riot in the American cut, and radically simplifies James Darren's role in the narrative. Should it therefore be regarded as a more accurate rendition of Franco's intentions, or is it simply yet another outsider's spin on the material, no more 'pure' than the American version? The editor of *Paroxismus* is named on the print as Bruno Mattei<sup>2</sup> so

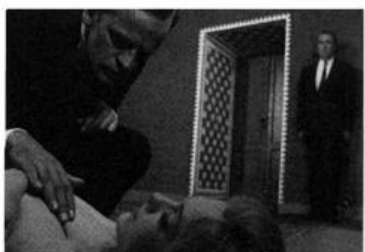
it's possible the structure of *Paroxismus* originates with him. Mattei is not exactly renowned for his avant-garde sensibilities; perhaps he found the plethora of options too confusing, and created a more linear version instead? It must be remembered, however, that according to Francesco Cesari's research on the subject<sup>3</sup>, the original theatrical release of *Paroxismus* submitted to the Italian censor in August 1969 ran to a whopping 95 minutes, twenty minutes longer than the off-air version!

The shorter cut screened on TV appears to have been an attempt, some time later, to salvage a releasable version by obliterating the contentious material with optical trickery. But if the film had to be shortened due to sexual explicitness, why would the editor go to the trouble of reformatting the storyline virtually from scratch? The purely *structural* differences between *Paroxismus* and *Venus in Furs* remain to be fully explained, although there is one possibility worth mentioning before we look at the specifics: perhaps Jess Franco *never completed* his own assembly of the film? It would explain why the two available versions differ in so many ways, large and small. There is not a single set-piece or sustained sequence that is edited the same way in both films, which suggests that there may have been no completed rough cut for anyone to refer to, only a sheaf of written notes and a big pile of film canisters. The film was a German co-production so there ought to be a German-language version too, however there is no record of it ever having played in Germany and a print stubbornly refuses to materialise. Unless the German version turns up to prove otherwise, it may be that Franco never actually finished his own cut...

As far as can be told from the off-air version, *Paroxismus* starts abruptly with Jimmy on the beach, digging his trumpet from the sand (although it's possible the real opening shots are missing from the recording). A woman's voice-over (revealed to be Wanda) ruminates over the first few seconds, referring to the man onscreen as 'Jimmy Logan'. When Jimmy sees a body in the waves and runs to the water's edge we arrive at the first really striking difference. In *Venus in Furs* the scene is conveyed via rhythmic slow motion, a post-production effect which stems from the ability of certain film projectors to advance a few frames at a time. This effect is entirely absent in *Paroxismus*; instead the shot plays out in real time. (The shakiness of Franco's hand-held camerawork here may explain why the American editors decided to use slow motion, as it smooths out the jerkiness considerably.) *Paroxismus* then features a scene in which Jimmy telephones the police about his discovery of a body, which provides exactly the rational narrative connection I suggested earlier was missing in the American version.

After the credits, which rise over a still of Jimmy's face, the next sequence begins with shots of immobile party-goers à la *Last Year at Marienbad*. In *Venus in Furs* the music and Jimmy's voice-over provide context; in *Paroxismus* the images are silent. Eventually, party chatter fades up and Wanda's voice-over returns, introducing the main protagonists: Ahmed, Olga and Kapp. When Ahmed takes Wanda to the cellar, they talk and kiss for a while before Olga





Above: Dennis Price as Kapp, taunted to death by the vengeful Wanda. Right: Jimmy trapped - running towards death - "She was beautiful, even though she was dead" - Olga's suicide - Venus in the hallway - Ahmed (Kinski) - the horror of the red room.



and Kapp appear and begin assaulting her. She calls to Ahmed for help, clarifying that he's meant to be her boyfriend; Ahmed is therefore betraying her. The whipping lasts longer in *Paroxysmus*, with extra shots of Wanda wriggling semi-nude on the floor. This brings us to another striking difference: in *Paroxysmus* there are no shots of Jimmy spying on the torture scene, in fact he doesn't appear at the party at all! The murder concludes with a voice-over from Ahmed, and different music – brooding strings on the US version, swooshing traffic sounds and a heavily echoed Manfred Mann composition on the Italian version. At this point *Venus in Furs* cuts back to Jimmy on the beach, musing over when the party actually happened (“I don't remember if it was last week, last month, or last year”). *Paroxysmus* has none of this, instead cutting directly to an establishing shot of Rio de Janeiro. Note that there is no indication in *Paroxysmus* that anything we've seen so far took place in Istanbul (it appears only in the last reel, as a place where Jimmy and Wanda go on vacation). Having established the setting as Rio, *Paroxysmus* cuts to Manfred Mann playing an uptempo number with Jess Franco on trombone (footage seen much later in the US version). The sequence uses more close-ups of Mann, including a classic ‘Franco zoom’ into his face (the jazz band scenes are generally longer in *Paroxysmus*, with extra shots of Jess).

Unique to *Paroxysmus* is a scene with Paul Müller's character Hermann, standing at a bar watching the band. A figure who looks and sounds like a man wanders across to chat with him: “A lesbian,” Hermann informs the girl he's with, once the person has moved on. The next change is Barbara McNair's rendition of the title song, which plays at the end of *Venus in Furs* but pops up in the middle of *Paroxysmus*, intercut with Jimmy following Wanda into a garden outside the club. The scene that follows, as Wanda ‘speaks’ to Jimmy through the glass panel of a door, is artily enigmatic in the US version, conveyed with music but no words. In *Paroxysmus* we hear their dialogue: Jimmy asks who she is, and she replies “My name is Wanda.” Here then is another seismic difference between the two versions: not only did Jimmy not witness Wanda's murder in *Paroxysmus*, he doesn't even know her name!

This brings us to Kapp's death. The music begins differently, with no additional electronics or phased violin, quite a bit less saxophone, and no declamatory coda of “*Venus in Furs* will be smiling!” The picture editing is different in many respects, and in general the scene is somewhat less powerful than in *Venus in Furs*. In addition, the sequence is spoiled by a crude ‘psychedelic’ overlay of dubious origin, in a different aspect ratio to the original footage. *Paroxysmus* goes on to remove a shot of two gay men dancing together at Hermann's party, along with a shot of a clearly stoned man tripping, while Olga and Wanda's lesbian clinch on the chaise longue is overlaid with more psychedelic effects. The latter scene also loses a shot in which Hermann sprinkles feathers over the two women as they kiss. Note that although the sadomasochistic whipping of Wanda is longer in *Paroxysmus*, intimations of drug use, homosexuality and lesbianism are trimmed or obscured.

After an additional conversation between Rita and a white-haired man at a party, the next notable aspect of *Paroxysmus* is an entirely new outdoor sequence in which Wanda and Jimmy walk through a garden before bumping into Hermann and a group of intellectuals expounding theories on Spiritualism. We then cut to the lovemaking scene between Jimmy and Wanda, which occurred earlier in the US version. *Paroxysmus* overlays the couple's post-coital conversation with yet more psychedelic opticals, and to add insult to injury they simply stop in mid-scene, as though someone in post-production has flicked a switch by mistake. The scene at Olga's studio is scored differently in *Paroxysmus*, utilising a previously unheard jazz-rock number, and the suicide is more graphic: Olga cuts her wrist three times, although annoyingly the scene is overlaid with yet more optical effects. Ahmed's death scene is similarly ruined by these increasingly tiresome overlays. *Venus in Furs* implies death by erotic frustration, but *Paroxysmus* dubs in a sound suggesting that Wanda is stabbing Ahmed (out of frame, possibly in the groin). The death scene is also notable for a new piece of music by Manfred Mann, which combines sounds from the Kapp murder sequence with a sinister new organ motif.

The last fifteen minutes of *Paroxysmus* are drastically different from *Venus in Furs*. Jimmy's exploration of the graveyard occurs without optical effects, and disappointingly the whole ‘Red Room’ sequence is missing. So too is the twist ending on the beach. Instead of Jimmy pulling his own body from the waves, we cut to him at his beach house, walking by the sea, playing the title theme on his trumpet. The last shot is an unremarkable close-up of his face... The enormous difference in style and impact here presents us with a frustrating combination of positive and negative. We lose the risible voice-over from *Venus in Furs* but we lose the final twist as well – having Jimmy drag his own corpse from the water was at least a proper ending of sorts. *Paroxysmus* offers nothing to make up for its absence; instead it ends on a bit of a whimper.

**Press coverage:** “*Venus in Furs* features much inept fancy moviemaking (including echoes of *La dolce vita* and even *Vertigo*), some semi-nudity, and virtually endless confusion,” sniffed *The New York Times*;<sup>4</sup> The *Variety* reviewer was more sympathetic, remarking, “If all Darren's narration and half of his dialogue with Miss McNair were cut, *Venus in Furs* might have been a fascinating film, with the mysteries sparked by the audience's imagination rather than smothered in bad writing.”<sup>5</sup> ...

Bad reviews were the least of the film's troubles on release in Italy. Opening in the northern provinces (the earliest apparent screening being in Novi Ligure on 29 October 1969), *Paroxysmus* was to prove highly controversial, as the following article from *La Stampa* shows: “Bologna 20 December 1971: The court of Bologna condemned actors Margaret Lee and Klaus Kinski, leading players of the film *Paroxysmus*, to three months imprisonment and a fine of 40 000 lire for ‘complicity in an obscene spectacle.’ The same condemnation was suffered by Igino Bianchi, producer of the film, copies of which were confiscated together with the original. All three of the convicted have

taken advantage of a suspended sentence. The film (a tangled story of reincarnation and sexuality) appeared on the screen in 1969. It was on release for around three months when a viewer in Verona, in a letter to the Prosecutor of the Republic, denounced the film, considering it obscene. The film was viewed by judges and withdrawn from circulation. Today, before a second penal session, *Paroxysmus* was judged by the court 'a work of little artistic content and only a pretext for the exhibition of nudity and relations against nature. Even in the current age of moral evolution, the film is to be considered an insult to the modesty of the average citizen.'"<sup>6</sup>

## EUGENIE... THE STORY OF HER JOURNEY INTO PERVERSION

West Germany, Spain, Liechtenstein [& USA/UK] 1969

Original theatrical title in country of origin

**Wildkatzen** (GER) *Wildcats*

**Eugenie ...the Story of her Journey into Perversion** (US)

**Philosophy in the Boudoir** (UK) *Continental Film Review* listings note: there is no Spanish or 'Liechtensteinian' version of the film

Alternative titles

**De Sade 70 Geschlagen und Geliebt** (1st GER theatrical version - 1970 - unreleased) *De Sade 70 Beaten and Loved*

**Die Jungfrau und die Peitsche** (2nd GER theatrical version - 1972 - unreleased) *The Virgin and the Whip*

**Les Inassouvies** (FR theatrical) *The Unsatiated*

**Marquis de Sade's "Philosophy in the Boudoir"** (US DVD)

**De Sades Eugenie Die Jungfrau und die Peitsche** (GER DVD)

**De Sade 70** (shooting title)

Production companies

**Hape Film GmbH & Co. Produktionsgesellschaft** (Munich)

**Producciones Cinematográficas Balcázar** (Barcelona)

**Établissement Sargon** (Vaduz)

**Video-Tel International Inc.** (New York)

**Towers of London** (London) [uncredited]

© 1969 **Établissement Sargon** (Vaduz) [English-language prints]

Theatrical distributors

**Ausgesuchte Produktionen (A.P.) Film** (Hamburg)

**Distinction Films, Inc.** (New York) [a branch of National General Pictures]

**Cinecenta Film Distributors** (London)

Spain: none

Timeline

Shooting date	January	1969
London	January	1970

Birmingham, UK	12 April	1970
USA press screening	29 July	1970
USA (Los Angeles)	05 August	1970
West Germany	02 June	1972
French visa no. 38656 issued	31 August	1972
France*	15 February	1973
Belgium (Brussels)	22 March	1973

\*CNC entry says 16 August 1972, which is probably incorrect.

Theatrical running time

West Germany	81m
USA	91m
France	73m

**Cast:** **Maria Röhm** (Madame Marianne St. Ange, 'Madame Resnais'). **Marie Liljedahl** (Eugenie Mistival). **Jack Taylor** (Mirvel, Madame St. Ange's stepbrother). **Christopher Lee** (Dolmance). **Paul Müller** (Monsieur Mistival, Eugenie's father). **Maria Luisa Ponte** [as 'Ingrid Swenson'] (Madame Mistival). **Anney Kablan** [as 'Kaplan'] (Augustin, Madame St. Ange's gardener/boatman). **Kathy Lagarde** [as 'Uta Dahlberg'] (Teresa, the deaf-mute maid). *uncredited:* **Nino Korda** (Roches, cultist wearing top hat). **Herbert Fux** (Hardin, officiating priest at cult gathering). **Colette Giacobine** (Colette). **Jess Franco** (cultist with greasy hair).

**Credits:** directed by **Jess Franco**. written by **Harry Alan Towers** [as 'Peter Welbeck']. director of photography: **Manuel Merino**. music by **Bruno Nicolai**. producer: **Harry Alan Towers** [as 'Peter Welbeck']. *uncredited:* based on the novel "*Philosophy in the Boudoir*" by **Donatien Alphonse de Sade**. art director & costumes: **Carlos Viudes**. assistant director: **Ana María Settimó de Esteva**. camera operator: **Zavier Pérez Zofio**. camera assistant: **José Climent**.

**Synopsis:** *Dolmance*, a decadent aristocratic figure in period 'Hellfire Club' garb, delivers an opening address from the writings of the Marquis de Sade beside a naked woman on a sacrificial altar surrounded by a group of acolytes... Eugenie Mistival, a beautiful teenage girl who lives with her controlling mother, is feeling the first stirrings of sexuality and yearns for adventure. A friend of Eugenie's father, a sophisticated older woman called Marianne St. Ange (who operates as a high class prostitute called Madame Resnais), invites the girl to her private island for the weekend. Eugenie's father, who's having a sado-masochistic affair with Marianne, agrees to surrender his daughter to his mistress for who-knows-what sexual experiences. Arriving on the island, Eugenie meets Mirvel, Marianne's intense stepbrother, who can barely restrain his desire for her. Marianne seduces Eugenie by rubbing sun-tan oil into her breasts. Gradually, Marianne and Mirvel feed Eugenie snippets of the libertine philosophy of the Marquis de Sade, under the guise of an 'adult education' in literature. Marianne's handyman, Augustin, is concerned

for Eugenie, but keeps his counsel because Marianne rescued him from the gutter and gave him a job. Teresa, Marianne's deaf-mute servant, is oblivious and can do nothing. Marianne and Mirvel, it transpires, are members of Dolmance's circle of libertines, all of whom have been invited to the island to enjoy Eugenie. Mirvel and Marianne drug Eugenie and strip her, and Mirvel takes advantage of her semi-consciousness to explore her most intimate regions. Later that evening she's drugged again. Dolmance and his followers arrive, dressed in French 18th century garb. Marianne and Mirvel strip the dazed and drugged Eugenie and thrash her with whips and assorted tools of torture as Dolmance reads from the works of the Marquis ... When Eugenie wakes the next morning, the marks from the beating are gone; Marianne convinces her that she must have had an erotic dream. The three continue their 'pleasant holiday' with a boat ride around the island. That evening, however, the real fun begins: Dolmance and his sadistic friends turn up again, and reveal to Eugenie not only the depth of their cunning deception, but also the lengths to which she must now go, deeper and deeper into corruption...

**Production notes:** In January 1969 Franco began his second adaptation from the works of the Marquis de Sade, shot in three to four weeks in Barcelona and the Murcian port of Cartagena. Due to the erotic and sadistic situations depicted, as well as unfortunate difficulties with Towers's distribution dealings at the time, the release proved problematic in many territories. In West Germany the film was lined up for release three times, first as *De Sade 70 Geschlagen und Geliebt* in 1970 and second as *Die Jungfrau und die Peitsche* in 1972. Only on the third attempt, as *Wildkatzen* from A.P. Films, did it reach cinemas - three years after it was made. The intended distributors for the two withdrawn West German releases were: Alpha (for *De Sade 70 Geschlagen und Geliebt*) and Ceres Film (for *Die Jungfrau und die Peitsche*). Stills and posters were made bearing these earlier titles and company names, but only the *Wildkatzen* materials tallied with a proper theatrical release.

**Review:** *Eugenie... the Story of Her Journey into Perversion* is a Franco film that many a doubter could appreciate, providing they accept its sensuous, languorous pace - and as long as they dig cruelty. Freely adapted from the Marquis de Sade's *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, the storyline is audacious, the script often witty, the production values impressive, and for the most part the actors know how to communicate both screen sexiness and a hint of the delicious malice of Sade's writing, even if the story itself bears only a skeletal relation to its avowed source. In overall 'feel' it's akin to such classic 'drive the lady crazy' films as Romolo Guerrieri's *The Sweet Body of Deborah* and Umberto Lenzi's *Paranoia*, in part thanks to a great soundtrack by Bruno Nicolai, but as the story unfolds it begins to resound with the authentic wit of the Marquis.

The impetus for the film was the commercial success of *Marquis de Sade's "Justine"*, although for Franco himself there was a nagging sense that with *Justine* he had neutered the material. Hoping to do more justice to the author this time, Franco, aided by a decent

script from 'Peter Welbeck' (Towers), updated the story from the late 18th century to the modern day, lending a degree of erotic clarity and shock value, devoid of the leavening influence of costume drama. *Justine* was little more than a bawdy romantic adventure with a few filaments of nastiness running through; *Eugenie... the Story of her Journey into Perversion*, however, brings de Sade's cruelty into the present day, with as much explicitness as the times would allow. And in the creation of Dolmance's group of Sadean scholars-turned-practitioners, who dress in period garb as a kind of Hellfire Club salute to the Marquis, Franco reconfigured 'costume drama' as a fantasy world within the real world, cannily sidestepping the pitfalls that await those who try to evoke the historical past on a shoestring.

A certain amount of erotic investment is needed if this tale of an innocent seduced is going to appeal. De Sade's stories require that we put ourselves into the mindset of the libertine; mere sympathy for the plight of Eugenie would hardly lead to a satisfying viewing experience. The film's aura of silky-smooth decadence and debauchery requires that we savour the victim's dilemma, not thrill to her possible escape. As in many Sadean scenarios, one feels for the victim a touch of pity which is then frozen in mid-step, alchemically transmuted into a gloating enjoyment of their piteousness. 'Poor Eugenie!' one thinks, with a smirk of enjoyment and a cocked eyebrow. If these expressions find no echo in the viewer then all that's left is the horror; a monoscopic shrinkage of the Sadean viewpoint.

Now wait just a minute! What's all this about 'poor Eugenie' and 'innocence exploited'? Surely in Sade's *Philosophy in the Bedroom* Eugenie is a willing participant in vice? Yes, once again Towers and Franco have seriously tampered with the source material. Among the elements accurately transcribed are the principal players and their names: Dolmance, Madame St. Ange, Eugenie, Mirvel, Mistival, even the gardener Augustin, are all drawn from the original text. Their roles and eventual fates, however, are very different. Madame St. Ange and Mirvel ought to be brother and sister; the film fudges by making them step-siblings. Eugenie's father becomes a weak, ineffectual character manipulated by erotic blackmail into giving up Eugenie, instead of deciding for himself that she should be freed from the shackles of conventional morality. Dolmance in the book is a constant and lascivious participant in the most extraordinary sexual activities; here he's simply a formal master of ceremonies. But the greatest divergence is the depiction of Eugenie. In Sade, Eugenie is an avid pupil from the start, who takes to the erotic and amoral teachings of Dolmance with alacrity. Although she often raises token demurrals, not once does she persist in arguing against the philosophy of the libertine; instead, her initial queries are the flimsiest of pretexts for Sade to vent his ideas through Dolmance. Each tremulous objection is set upon savagely, and Eugenie immediately and happily accepts the conclusions. Franco and Towers, to the contrary, paint her as a victim, an innocent, tricked and manipulated into murder and vice.



She is momentarily corrupted and begins to enjoy her infamy, but then retreats from it again. Essentially, what we have here is 10% Eugenie and 90% Justine, with the girl allowed a few moments to enjoy vengeance and murder before being flung back into righteousness and remorse. Franco and Towers did not embrace Sade's vision of a young girl consumed by the joy of libertinage; the film tells a completely different story instead.

The changes wrought upon the original require Christopher Lee to misquote Sade in the opening speech. The quotation begins faithfully, as Dolmance pronounces, "*Lewd women, let the voluptuous heroine [St. Ange] be your model; after her example, be heedless of all that contradicts pleasure's divine laws, by which all her life she was enchained.*" His following sentence, however, is truncated: "*As for all you young maidens, thus achieve the ultimate in pleasure.*" The original text says: "*You young maidens, too long constrained by a fanciful Virtue's absurd and dangerous bonds and by those of a disgusting religion, imitate the fiery Eugénie; be as quick as she to destroy, to spurn all those ridiculous precepts inculcated in you by imbecile parents.*"<sup>11</sup> This was changed of course because Eugenie in the film is no longer an inspiration for young voluptuaries... Another divergence is the removal of Eugenie's mother, Madame de Mistival (an important figure in the book), and the merging of her fate with that of Madame St. Ange. In Sade, everything leads to the shocking scene in which Eugenie, having embraced Dolmance's philosophy, enthusiastically participates in the rape and torture of her own mother. This, it would seem, is a story for which the screen was not ready; if the incestuous relationship between Madame St. Ange and Mirvel could not be maintained honestly, how much less likely was the rape and torture of a mother by her daughter? This act, which Sade saw as the crowning glory of his tale, is nowhere to be found in *Eugenie... the Story of her Journey into Perversion*. Instead, Franco and Towers nominate Madame St. Ange for Madame de Mistival's fate: she becomes the dupe in a plot hatched by Dolmance and Mirvel, with Eugenie as the neophyte encouraged to join in.

So why remould the lead character so completely? Firstly, Towers and Franco needed to sidestep Eugenie's rapturous embrace of vice because it would short-circuit the script (after all, where to go with it, except like Sade into more and more depraved depictions of sex and violence?). Then there was the problem of Eugenie raping her own mother. Having decided that such an act could not be shown, Towers's script essentially starts again with the character, and in reconceiving Eugenie it appears that he set out to create a more plausible and contemporary Justine. With the film set in the present day, both Towers and Franco must have felt that a heroine who suffered all manner of assaults upon her person without fighting back, and who maintained a prudish piety throughout, was unlikely to 'play' for a young audience in 1969. Religious notions of forbearance and heavenly reward for virtue keep Sade's 18th century Justine plodding along with the yoke of suffering round her neck; she is pinned to the cross of her own folly with Christian nails. To keep a modern girl like

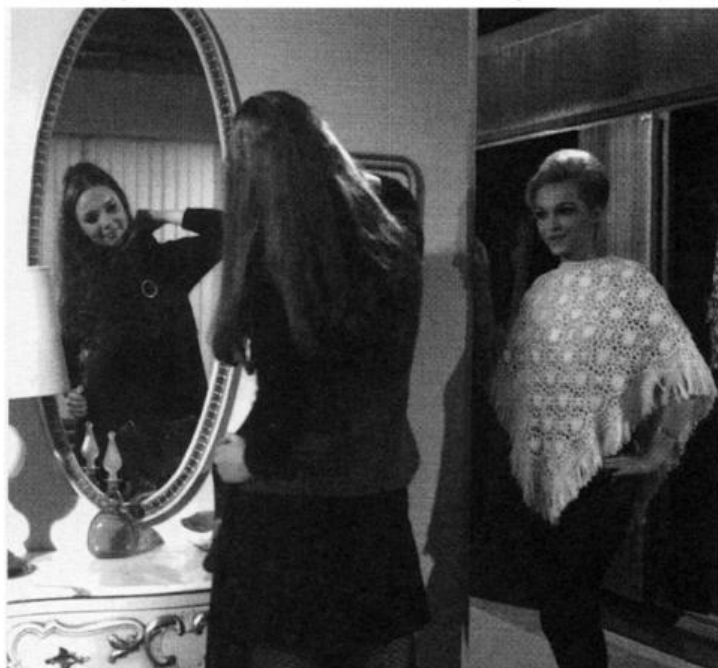
Eugenie in torment, reasons Towers, subterfuge is required. And so she undergoes repeated tortures that are passed off as dreams and which turn out to be charades arranged by Dolmance. The scenario is further enhanced by drugs, leading to the heroine's confusion about what is real and imagined. This, rather than Christian meekness and naïvety, explains why she consistently falls into the same traps without running for help. *Eugenie...* concludes with this demi-Justine persuaded to avenge herself upon the unsuspecting Madame St. Ange, at which point she becomes, for a while, something more like Sade's heroine. But in order for the film to end with moral closure, she must revert to type; Dolmance leaves her morally tainted, exhausted, and knowing that thanks to him her mother will soon be calling the police. By bringing back the idea of Eugenie's mother, seen fleetingly at the beginning of the film, one can't help but feel that Towers was balking at the notion of youth attacking authority, be it parental (Madame Mistival) or quasi-parental (Madame St. Ange). The mother is allied with the authorities in bringing about the heroine's downfall; quite the opposite of her fate in *Philosophy in the Bedroom* in which she is raped, tortured, infected with syphilis and has her vagina and anus sewn shut by Eugenie! The Towers script ends as a morality play; by surrendering to vice (in this case, vengeance) Eugenie is damned. The production's decision not to turn Eugenie into a fully fledged libertine at the end is perhaps inevitable given the already racy subject. It would no doubt have been impossible to sell a film to distributors in which the innocent heroine, initially so pliant and gentle, becomes as savage and amoral as her tormentors. At least we see a glimpse of this in her treatment of Marianne St. Ange during the climax. Sodomy and homosexuality are likewise abandoned, although it's not surprising given that the key proselytiser for these in Sade's story is Dolmance: one imagines it would have been difficult to persuade Christopher Lee to fly the flag for back door action, no matter how literary the source.

So if the film is viewed as a Sade adaptation, we must once again complain that the essence has been tampered with. Taken on its own terms, however, as a sleazy and sexy thriller, it's a visual triumph for Franco, with moody widescreen compositions emphasising Eugenie's isolation from normality. Although a few shots here and there slide out of focus it doesn't really matter because the effect is conducive to the mood of druggy dislocation. For the most part the camera is carefully deployed, gliding in and out of rooms or sweeping slowly across gorgeous windswept vistas. Picturesque and yet foreboding, the photography broods and glowers, supported on the soundtrack with murmurous tendrils of the wind, whistling and keening through the narrative as in so many future Franco films (in fact I wonder if the sound recording is the same each time, a tape loop kept safely in Franco's sound archive?) The patina of glamour and wealth in which Franco enfold the story satisfies too, with gorgeously camp modern decor and elegant manners from the main cast. Maria Röhm in particular is fantastic at exuding the sort of cultivated European allure that Alfred Hitchcock might

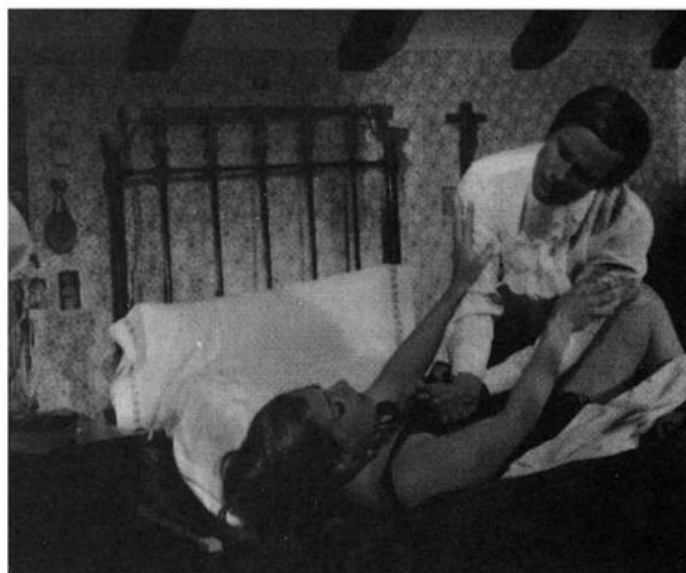




*above: A ceremony of sadism, led by 'bishop' Hardin (Herbert Fux), with Roches (Nino Korda) in top hat and Marianne (Maria Röhm) at the altar..  
below: Mirvel (Jack Taylor) and Marianne (Maria Röhm), brother and sister; Eugenie (Marie Liljedahl) feels better in the morning, with Marianne (Röhm).*







above: Liljedahl and Rôhm enjoy a casual spot of breast soaping; Mirvel (Jack Taylor) murders Thérèse (Kathy Lagarde), who "delighted in her own suffering".  
below: The cult of sadism finds its voice: Christopher Lee as Dolmance, with Herbert Fux as Hardin (left).





have loved, conveying stylish menace or brisk friendly frivolity as the story alternately demands.

Among a few smaller problems, the script runs into bathos here and there, especially when it comes to expressing Eugenie's confusion. For instance, when Madame St. Ange asks Eugenie, "Remember the dream you had this afternoon? Maybe you'll dream again tonight", Eugenie's reply – "I hope not. Or do I? It's very difficult" – hits the viewer around the head with a mallet marked 'erotic ambiguity' when a feather might have served better. Also the pacing is off, especially in the middle third, where softcore interludes are allowed to drag just a little too much. One scene in particular I wouldn't mind seeing cut down to size is a shot of Mirval opening and closing the blinds in Eugenie's bedroom before making his move and ravishing her drugged body. Even the baroque extravagance of a deep red filter with which Franco deluges the image isn't quite enough to earn the scene its rather punishing eight minute length. The only really unfortunate flaw, because it has the ability to dull the film's emotional effect, is Marie Liljedahl's inability to convey suffering. We never see quite enough fear and confusion in her eyes. She's better than Romina Power in *Justine*, but her undeniably beautiful young body, her pouty prettiness and air of naivety carry her only so far; the story requires her to undertake a darker, more complex journey than she seemingly has the ability or willingness to convey. As she suffers a heinous betrayal and then becomes embroiled in the sadistic activities of the film's climax, we really ought to see in her face the "corruption" of which Dolmance speaks with such relish; sadly Liljedahl looks almost blank, perhaps hoping that this would be sufficient to represent trauma.

No matter, the film rises above even this stumbling block and survives on its aura of woozy, psychedelic maliciousness. Jess Franco is once again elaborating a favourite theme that would run through many of his best works – the difficulty of navigating between fantasy, illusion and reality in a world populated by cruel and manipulative characters. The idea of Eugenie's fantasy world being an illusion is cleverly folded into the 'real-life' portion of the film: the bruises and lacerations from her night of pain have disappeared in the morning, leaving the audience as puzzled as the character. Only later, when Dolmance explains his cunning scheme, do we understand all the levels of artifice and illusion at play. Having thus revealed the depravity of Eugenie's fate, Franco inaugurates with a flourish his use of a circular structure that returns the characters to their starting blocks. Although a dramaturgical cliché in many ways, it works very nicely here, and would serve him well in later stories such as *Les Croqueuses* and the morbid sex drama *The Hot Nights of Linda*.

**Franco on screen:** Seen just briefly in the red-filtered opening sequence, Franco looks every inch the sleazy voyeur (no 'Method acting' required) as he gazes intently at a Satanic orgy.

**Cast and crew:** Christopher Lee is an eminently suitable actor to convey the grand philosophy and forceful personality of Dolmance.

It's just a pity that his involvement was a source of discord for so many years. In his autobiography Lee asserted that he had no knowledge of the film's racy content: "*I narrated away [...] Everybody I could see kept their clothes on. There was nothing a Boy Scout could have quivered at. Little did I know that the woman on the altar behind me was naked, and that as soon as 'Cut' was called, drapery was swirled over her. Little did I know that the same scenes were reshot when I was back in London, and the actors then peeled. Little did I know of the cross-cutting from me to scenes of debauch that would take place. I first knew of it when I heard that despite being only a guest star my name figured at the very top of the credits on a cinema in Soho frequented by a phalanx of men in raincoats.*"<sup>22</sup> One has to wonder how an intelligent actor like Lee, fully cognisant of the writings of the Marquis de Sade, could expect a film of this nature to eschew nudity and sexual situations; on the other hand it's not at all out of character for Franco and Harry Alan Towers to attempt such a deceitful ruse! Nowadays, with admirable dignity, Lee's opinion of the affair has softened to a tone of wry amusement, and one hopes that he might even see the film, nudity and all, for what it is; a fine attempt to depict Sadean imaginings in a commercial context ... In a DVD interview for the film, Franco claimed that Lee's role was originally intended for an actor called Bernard Peters, who died in a plane crash before filming. However, I've been unable to establish the existence of such an actor. There was a Werner Peters, but he died of a heart attack in 1971. In his autobiography, Christopher Lee stated: "*It was George Sanders's role. I was scrubbing my golfing kit for the weekend when the producer rang from Spain to say that Sanders had opted out through illness, the German substitute Wolfgang Preis had arrived by air, received the news that his wife had been killed in a car smash and flown home again, and would I drop everything and help out?*"<sup>23</sup> Even this account, however, has its problems: records indicate that Wolfgang Preiss was married to the same woman, Ruth Preiss, from 1955 until her death in 2002. Spanish Franco authority Carlos Aguilar says that the German actor in question was in fact Horst Frank, which is plausible considering that he had played the Marquis de Bressac in Franco's *Justine* a few months earlier.

**Music:** A wonderful late 1960s smorgasbord of a score from Bruno Nicolai, featuring the incomparable Edda Dell'Orso, the woman whose ethereal vocals swirl around many of the great Italian thrillers of the period. A scene in which the villains seduce Eugenie by giving her 'special' cigarettes ("*They're Turkish! Oriental!*") takes off into orbit with the addition of two wonderful pieces of music; the first a twanging ode to narcotic surrender, the second a blaring horn piece that celebrates sadism with a garish enthusiasm.

**Studios:** Filmed at Estudios Balcázar (Barcelona).

**Locations:** Cartagena and La Manga del Mar Menor (Murcia) and Barcelona.

**UK theatrical release:** There is no record at the BBFC of this film having been released in the UK. However, Christopher Lee asserts that a friend saw it advertised on the billboard of a London sex cinema, and sure enough, *Continental Film Review* lists a film



called *Philosophy in the Boudoir* playing The Tottenham Court Road Cineclub in January 1970. It would seem that the film circumvented censorship by playing solely in cinema clubs; it also toured the regions, turning up in April 1970 at the Compton Club, Birmingham, and in June 1970 at the Leicester Penthouse.

**Connections:** Though often thwarted or softened by censorship, incest is a common theme of Franco's. Sade's work is full of forced and unforced incestuous couplings/triplings/quadruplings, and *Philosophy in the Bedroom* is predicated on an especially monumental act of sadistic incest so extreme that no one has ever dared film it. For Sade, and for Franco, the appeal is obviously the transgression of a major societal taboo. Franco never sired a child so he never had the fantasy crushed by reality (though see 1974's *Exorcism* for an example of how close to the line he was prepared to go with his step-daughter Caroline Rivière). Nevertheless, incest fascinated him as a voyeur and a fantasist: throughout the 1970s and 1980s it would become almost as frequent an ingredient of his stories as nightclub strip-shows, lesbianism, and people called Radeck. One could argue that, in Franco, incest first appears in sublimated form in the father-daughter relationships of *The Awful Dr. Orloff* (1962) and *Dr. Orloff's Monster* (1964). Unfortunately, the moral climate of the day meant that even in 1969 Franco felt he had to convert the central love affair between brother and sister in *Philosophy in the Bedroom* into *Eugenie... the Story of her Journey into Perversion's* less taboo-breaking tryst between step-brother and step-sister. Such obvious kowtows to censorship are annoying, but given the realities of film production at the time it's just too bad: besides, it's an obvious enough ploy behind which the true intention can still be perceived. Mirvel frequently refers to Marianne as 'sister' and only in one exchange as 'step-sister', with Jack Taylor dropping the offending remark into the dialogue as if discarding a soiled tissue ... Franco would restage the father-daughter dynamic more faithfully in his superlative *Eugenie* (1970) and return to the essentials of *Philosophy in the Bedroom* in *How to Seduce a Virgin* (1973) and the brilliant *Eugenie, Historia de una perversion* (1980), while certain key scenes are also replayed in the misleadingly titled *The Sexual Story of O* (1983).

**Other versions:** In the USA the film was distributed as *Eugenie... the Story of her Journey into Perversion* (according to Franco, by exploitation legend Jerry Gross, who booked it into the famous Chinese Theatre in Los Angeles). In France it came out as *Les Inassouvies*. In Germany, the film was originally to have been distributed in 1970 under the title *De Sade 70 - Geschlagen und geliebt*, however the release was pulled due to censorship problems. In 1972, Hamburg's AP Film prepared a version under the title *Die Jungfrau und die Peitsche*; however, censorship intervened again. At last the film was released in June 1972 as *Wildkatzen*. Some sources mention a Spanish version entitled *La isla de la muerte*, but this appears to be a mistake. In the UK it bypassed the BBFC and popped up as *Philosophy in the Boudoir*.

**Problematica:** Several of the Spanish actresses in the film were

given Scandinavian-sounding pseudonyms, presumably to make it appear to unsuspecting punters that this was another of Marie Liljedahl's highly successful Swedish sex films, something the poster art also strove to imply.

**Press coverage:** Little enthusiasm greeted this now well-regarded Franco effort at the time of its release. *Variety's* reviewer was distinctly unimpressed: "Dead fish by any other name would smell as bad. As either melodrama or erotica, it is basically lifeless. A turn-off." He then naively goes on to enquire, "Miss Liljedahl is, however, young, fresh and pretty. What's a nice girl like her doing in dirty movies like this?" (to which *Variety's* rather more worldly editor replied, parenthetically, "She started in them.")<sup>4</sup> John R. Duvoli in the debut issue of *Cinefantastique* was similarly underwhelmed, although he had a diametrically opposed view of Maria Liljedahl: "Somehow the film never gets off the ground ... Miss Liljedahl soon finds herself part of some pretty odd perversions and games, but her initiation is somehow never believable, nor her crises compelling. It is difficult to accept her as a frightened innocent or even to accept the fact that she is (or ever was!) virginal ... Taken on its own terms, the film is not bad, simply undistinguished."<sup>5</sup>

## SEX CHARADE

### Liechtenstein [& Spain] 1969

#### Alternative titles

**A comme apocalypse** (shooting title) *Like an Apocalypse*

**Le Labyrinthe** (FR shooting title)

**El laberinto** (SP shooting title)

note: there is no 'Liechtensteinian' version of the film

#### Production companies

**Prodif Ets.** (Vaduz)

**Cooperativa Fénix Films** (Madrid) [uncredited]

#### Theatrical distributors

France	none
Spain	none

#### Timeline

Shooting date	19 May - 4 June	1969
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**Cast:** Paul Müller. Soledad Miranda [as 'Susan Korda'] (Anne). Jack Taylor. Diana Lorys. Maria Röhm [as 'Maria Khon']. Howard Vernon.

**Credits:** director: Jess Franco. screenplay: Jess Franco. director of photography: Manuel Merino. music: Bruno Nicolai.

**Synopsis** [from a Canadian press sheet]: *A radio announcement warns that a dangerous lunatic has escaped from a hospital in West Berlin. He's a maniac and a sadist who has already murdered several victims. Anne hears the broadcast and reacts with fear: she lives alone, without neighbours, and her cottage is quite close to the hospital. Just as she has begun to calm herself, the maniac enters through a window. He assures her that he will do no harm; he simply wishes to spend the night at her house waiting for his criminal accomplices to pick him up at dawn. In order for him to stay awake, and to avoid Anne warning the police, he insists that she keep talking to him at all times. She responds to the challenge by telling a story which mirrors her own predicament in metaphorical form: a young woman is trapped by cruel savages, manages to escape, returns to civilization but eventually begins to miss her captivity. At dawn, the maniac is asleep, lulled by Anne's story. Seeing her opportunity, and bearing no relation to the masochistic character in her story, she kills the man in passionate revenge.*

**Production notes:** In the summer of 1969 Franco managed to dash off two quickies, *Nightmares Come at Night* and *Sex Charade*, financed by a tiny production outfit called Prodif Ets., apparently working out of Vaduz in Liechtenstein. Did Franco encounter Prodif Ets. through his connection to Harry Alan Towers? The latter's films were often co-financed by a Liechtensteinian company called Établissement Sargon, although the tales of Towers's financial acumen and creative accounting at the Towers of London business empire lead one to wonder just how 'established' the Liechtenstein company was. Some might therefore suggest that Prodif was no more a 'regular' company than Établissement Sargon, with Franco being inspired to set up a tax-shelter company of his own after observing the way Towers ran his activities.

Around this time, during May of 1969, Franco found himself the victim of a robbery which he reported to police, and which saw coverage in the Madrid press: a cab driver made off with 350,000 pesetas, money that Franco had accidentally left in a bag in the back seat while he entered a bank in Madrid. When he returned, the cab had disappeared!<sup>1</sup>

In his book *Una vida dedicada al cine: recuerdos de un productor*, Spanish producer Arturo Marcos Tejedor refers to *Sex Charade* thus: "I also produced another [film], planned and directed by Jesús Franco, unfit for [submission to] the Spanish censor, entitled "*Sex Charade*", shot in Istanbul and destined for the foreign market, with French nationality. There were French and English versions made, but I received nothing for my 50% participation and lost all of my investment - some million pesetas."<sup>2</sup> Sadly neither the French nor English version has materialised in the forty-four years since the film was financed, making it perhaps the most sought after Franco rarity of all.

The only genuinely 'lost' Franco film of the 1960s, *Sex Charade* excites the imagination for two reasons: the highly unusual plot, which bears no relation to any Franco story before or since, and

the presence of the iconic Soledad Miranda, who presumably carried much of the screen time with her Scheherazade-influenced story (note the punning title: *Scheherazade/Sex Charade*). For a while in 2009, rumours abounded that a version was due for DVD release; cover art even showed up on the internet. But release date after release date flew by, and word got around that the DVD company had discovered the film print was lacking a soundtrack. Subsequent explanations have thrown even this story into doubt; it seems that the whole affair was simply a mix-up with mis-labelled film canisters.

Film journalist and occasional participant in Franco's films, Jean-Pierre Bouyxou, recalls seeing a film under the name *Sex Charade* in a French porno theatre, which spliced together scenes he believes were Franco's with an otherwise nondescript German sex film starring German actor Rinaldo Talamonti. I quote his observations here courtesy of Alain Petit, who first printed them in *The Manacoe Files*: "A girl half-naked in a cage. She has blue hair (!). She is ambushed by Indians equipped with feathered whips in a theatrically unreal jungle. There is no sound, no music, no dialogue, nothing. According to my notes, this silence "boggles the mind". The Indians grope the girl through the bars of the cage. All this is filmed with shots that zoom backwards only, repeatedly, and I found it - again according to my notes - "Awesome!". The girl clings to a rope by which she is pulled and dragged by Indians (note: these are not Native American Indians but Hindu Indians) to the feet of a beautiful naked native woman who is literally covered with jewels. There follows a scene ("fantastically horny" I noted) of non-penetrative lesbian sex between the prisoner and the Indian woman, who is assisted by Jack Taylor and Howard Vernon, both playing Hindus. Suddenly the prisoner kills her mistress. This is the end of the Franco clip."<sup>3</sup> These scenes, lasting no more than seven or eight minutes, could well form part of the synopsis given above, with this lesbian goddess one of the characters in Soledad Miranda's dramatised monologue.

According to Alain Petit, *Sex Charade* was presented in the film market at Cannes in 1972 and included in a sales brochure by Canadian import-exporters Cinepix, the company who launched the commercial career of David Cronenberg. The only existing piece of promotional artwork for the film, which lists the notoriously untraceable Prodif Ets. as sole production company, comes from the Cinepix brochure. Did the film ever see the light of a projector in (presumably French-speaking) Canada? No trace of a Canadian release has surfaced, but it is just possible...

**Cast and crew:** Just look at that cast: Soledad Miranda, Paul Müller, Howard Vernon, Maria Röhm, Diana Lorys, Jack Taylor. The presence of Röhm (Towers's wife, let's not forget) suggests that Franco had persuaded her to 'moonlight' from the Towers films and appear in one of his ultra-low budget 'privately financed' productions; even he could hardly have passed off scenes depicting the worship of an Indian goddess as a 'weird' dream sequence in *Count Dracula* or *The Bloody Judge*!

**Locations:** Istanbul.

## THE BLOODY JUDGE

Spain, West Germany, Italy, Liechtenstein,  
UK [& USA] 1969

French visa number: 40392

Italian visa number: 55470

*Original theatrical title in country of origin*

**El proceso de las brujas** (SP) *Trial of the Witches*

**Der Hexentöter von Blackmoor** (GER) *The Witch Killer of Blackmoor*

**Il trono di fuoco** (IT) *Throne of Fire*

**Night of the Blood Monster** (US)

note: there is no 'Liechtensteinian' version of the film

*Alternative titles*

**Le Trône de feu** (FR theatrical) *Throne of Fire*

**El poder del fuego** (SP video) *The Power of Fire*

**De Sadistische Rechter** (NL video) *The Sadistic Judge*

**El proceso de las brujas (El Juez sangriento)** (alt SP title)

**Il trono di fuoco Il giudice sanguinario** (alt IT title)

**Proceso a las brujas** (SP shooting title)

*Production companies*

**Fénix Films** (Madrid)

**Terra-Filmkunst GmbH** (Munich)

**Prodimex Films** (Rome)

**Towers of London** (London)

**American international Pictures** (Los Angeles) [uncredited]

© 1970 Établissement Sargon (Vaduz) [English-language prints]

© 1972 American International Pictures, Inc. [US prints]

*Theatrical distributors*

**Arce Films** (Spain)

**Constantin-Film** (Munich)

**Garigliano Film** (Italy)

**American International Pictures** (USA)

**Doverton Films** (London)

*Timeline*

Shooting date	08 August -10 Oct	1969
Italian visa number 55470 issued	04 February	1970
Italian premiere (source: <i>Gramesi</i> )	05 February	1970
West German certificate	12 May	1970
West Germany premiere	05 June	1970
Rome (source: <i>l'Unità</i> )	11 June	1970
Madrid	24 May	1971
Barcelona	25 October	1971
Seville	26 November	1971
USA (San Antonio, TX)	14 May	1972
French visa no. issued	09 March	1973
France	14 June	1973
UK 'AA' certificate issued	28 May	1974

*Theatrical running time*

Italy	98m
Spain	90m
France	96m
West Germany	81m
UK*	81m
USA	82m

\*see Appendix

*Cast:* **Christopher Lee** (Lord Judge George Jeffreys). **Maria Schell** (Mother Rosa, a witch). **Hans Hass** (Lord Henry 'Harry' Sefton). **José María Prada** (Palafox, Jeffries' manservant). **Maria Röhm** (Mary Gray). **Margaret Lee** (Alicia Gray). **Leo Genn** (Lord Sutton of Wessex). **Milo Quesada** (Satchel, bailiff to Lord Wessex). **Peter Martell** (Barnaby, a friend of Harry's). **Werner Abrolat** (Inquisitor Matt, jailer). **José Martínez Blanco** (Steven Truro). **Howard Vernon** (Jack Ketch, Jeffreys' executioner). **Vicente Roca** (Sergeant Allan, prosecutor). **Diana Lorys** (Sally Downes). *uncredited:* **Guillermo Méndez** (Jeffreys' Captain of the Guard).

*Credits:* directed by **Jess Franco**. based on an original story by **Harry Alan Towers** [as 'Peter Welbeck']. screenplay: **Anthony Scott Veitch** / **Michael Haller** [GER prints add]. story & screenplay: **Jess Franco**, **Enrico Colombo** [IT prints]. lighting cameraman: **Manuel Merino**. editor: **Derek Parsons** / **Gertrud Petermann** [GER prints add] / **Maria Luisa Soriano** [IT prints]. art director: **George O. Brown** / **Antonio G. Sanabria** [SP prints]. music by **Bruno Nicolai**. producer: **Harry Alan Towers**. executive producer: **Arturo Marcos Tejedor** [SP prints]. production manager: **Enrico Colombo** [IT prints]. unit manager: **Renato Sardini** [IT prints]. assistant directors: **John Thompson** / **G. Alberto Chiarolla** [IT prints]. continuity: **Maria Grazia Grossi** [IT prints]. camera operator: **Emmanuele Di Cola** [IT prints]. seamstress: **Irene Mazzeo**. make-up: **Aureliano Renzetti** [IT prints]. assistant editor: **Ferruccio Massini** [IT prints]. filmed in **CineScope**. colour by **Telecolor** (Rome) [IT prints]. dubbing editor: **Joyce Oxley**. *German version* post-synchronization: **Deutsche Synchron (Karlheinz Brunnemann)**. dialogue director: **Karlheinz Brunnemann**. dialogue: **Ursula Buschow**. editor: **Ursula Wingelmann**. *Italian version* recorded by **C.D.C.** at **Fono Roma** (Rome), supervised by **Sandro Lena** [IT prints]. *French version* by **Les Films de l'Acropole**, dialogue & artistic direction: **Daniele Gauthier**, technical direction: **Gilbert Brisdoux**. music publisher: **Bixio-Sam** (Milan) [IT prints].

"Everything is awesome, spectacular and breathtaking in this sensational movie! The most beautiful women, victims of the tyranny of a cruel and bloodthirsty Judge..."

Spanish admat



**Synopsis:** During the reign of James II, Lord Judge Jeffreys scourges the country for witches, and rebels who support the King's nephew and son-in-law, William of Orange. Jeffreys is totally unscrupulous, and has no qualms about using the former as a means to prosecute cases against the latter. Young and beautiful Alicia Gray is picked up by Jeffreys' men at a maypole dance with a young man called Cappel, her lover, who's known to support William of Orange. Cappel is killed on the spot and Alicia is brought before Judge Jeffreys, who declares her a witch and sends her to be tortured by his executioner Jack Ketch. Alicia's sister Mary Gray approaches Jeffreys and begs for her sister's life, but to no avail. After enduring terrible agonies, Alicia is finally burned alive. While in the locality, Jeffreys visits the Earl of Wessex to berate him: there has been a groundswell of support in the region for William of Orange. Jeffreys warns Wessex that his son, Lord Harry Sefton, has remained close friends with Barnaby, a known rebel. Wessex's manservant Satchell inadvertently mentions in Jeffreys' presence that Harry is involved with Mary Gray, knowledge which Jeffreys gleefully seizes upon to put pressure on Wessex. Jeffreys insists upon meeting Mary, but before he can do so he receives word that the Duke of Monmouth's forces are attacking, and the rebellion against King James requires his presence. Satchell is ordered to hold the girl prisoner while Jeffreys deals with his military responsibilities. Satchell tries to rape Mary but she manages to pull free, burning her attacker's face in the struggle. Satchell, now bitterly hateful of Mary and the Wessexes, signs up to work for Jeffreys. Wessex, Harry, Barnaby and Mary Gray are now vulnerable to the 'Bloody Judge' and his wicked machinations. With the Monmouth rebellion successfully put down, Jeffreys turns his attention to the beautiful Mary...

**Review:** The most handsome and expensive-looking production in Jess Franco's long career, this closely resembles the sort of 'class' product he is so often derided for failing to offer elsewhere. *The Bloody Judge* has decently researched historical context, sexy women in low-cut gowns, Christopher Lee, impressive battle scenes, massed marauders on horseback; all the pomp and finery of a well-heeled British horror drama. A kissing cousin to Michael Reeves' *Witchfinder General* and Michael Armstrong's *Mark of the Devil*, it's an absorbing tale with much to recommend it. It also delivers copiously as sadistic spectacle: in the uncut edition the torture scenes are prolonged, nasty, and brutal to behold, with the agonies suffered by Alicia on the rack, for instance, among the bloodiest Franco ever depicted.

Michael Reeves' *Witchfinder General* resonated with young audiences in the UK and America in part because it chimed with growing rebelliousness against an unjust Establishment. Armstrong's *Mark of the Devil*, on the other hand, plays costume drama dress-up games in order to pad out salacious torture scenes. So is Franco echoing Reeves and his anti-Establishment vibe? Or is he more like Armstrong, cannily 'digging' the opportunity to offer sex and violence to sensation-hungry audiences under cover of period frocks and historical biography? In truth it's a bit of both. Franco really *was* anti-authoritarian, an active rebel

in his homeland, a man who repeatedly incurred the wrath of the Spanish censor board in a country under the rule of its own 'Judge Jeffreys'. On the other hand, he's also a sadistic voyeur par excellence, relishing the retreat of censorship and using every opportunity to film sexy or nasty scenes, knowing that although they won't make it into every version, he'll get away with it in one market or another. The torture of Alicia goes on for almost three minutes in the uncut version, and that's a long time for a film made in 1970; Franco was getting high on sex and violence, and if it must be violence committed by evil State villains, so be it. Franco both decries characters like Jeffreys and his torturing hangman Ketch, and relishes the vicious spectacle of their cruelty. The torture of Mary Gray is gratuitously nasty and protracted, with much leering from both the torturers and Franco's equally lecherous camera. On the other hand, a montage about an hour into the film including shots of torn flesh and teeth being yanked out of screaming mouths turns out to be a nightmare from which Judge Jeffreys awakes with a jolt and a hypocritical shudder. Although Jeffreys condemns people to such horrors with alacrity, he never witnesses the results of his decisions, and has no stomach for the details; a point made even more forcefully later, when he observes an execution in progress and staggers away sickened. So we have violence as kinky spectacle mixed with violence as moral commentary; a gruesome and inconsistent cocktail likely to cause indigestion if consumed without a chaser of irony.

However, Franco is not simply having a ball with 'the old in-out' and 'lashings of ultra-violence'. He's also getting his kicks from working with some fine British actors. The scenes in which Christopher Lee and Leo Genn go head-to-head are not only beautifully acted (and dubbed, thankfully, by the actors themselves), they're also immaculately shot and given the emphasis they deserve in terms of pacing and presentation. Howard Vernon too gives his role as Jack Ketch some pep, although one *could* argue he's hamming it up a little. Among the rest of the cast, Hans Hass Jr. is decent in the 'young hero' role (and he certainly looks the part) while Maria Schell is suitably sorrowful and otherworldly as an isolated cave-dwelling witch. But in the end, this is Christopher Lee's film, and he pours the rich dark claret of his personal grandeur into the part. He draws upon other aspects of his character too, facets with which we're familiar from accounts of his offscreen behaviour: irritability, pomposity, severity, and a dry wit shot through with filigree traces of sarcasm and danger. It's a performance that makes you realise just how much of his talent went to waste in the Hammer *Dracula* films, where he was asked merely to snarl when he could have offered so much more.

The role of witchcraft in the film is interesting, with Pagan rites involving the burning of effigies and pins being stuck in dolls, and Maria Schell playing a wise old blind woman living in the hills who has foreknowledge of what's to come. Being a 'white witch', she prays to God for poor Mary, and describes the vengeful, facially mutilated Satchell as one who "*has been marked by the*

*Prince of Darkness*". Magic and witchcraft in Franco is often for real, although the moral balance of the story can be compromised by his credulity (See *The Demons*, 1972). In terms of sexual fun (excluding torture), there's a brief shot of Maria Röhm's pussy in the straw as she smooches with topless Hans Hass, and a tender scene in which Diana Lorys washes blood off a nude Maria Röhm in preparation for her evening with Judge Jeffreys. The subsequent night of passion, far less explicit in the English language edition, is augmented in the German cut with shots of a man's hands fondling Röhm's breasts and vagina. (Note: the hands look far too young to be Christopher Lee's, and you can be sure he would never have agreed to such crudity himself.) There is one more scene to mention; surely be the most gratuitous lesbian scene in a Franco film. As virtuous Mary Gray is released to be taken to Jeffreys, the executioner points to a severely whipped semi-conscious naked woman hanging by her wrists nearby. "Look at that!", he sneers, "That could happen to you too!". At this point, in an act I suppose of Christian compassion, Mary proceeds to lick the blood from the naked woman's legs and midriff, before embracing her breast to breast. Cutaways to Vernon leering at this unexpected 'lesbo action' remind us that this spectacle of degradation, masquerading as pious tenderness, has been arranged to appeal to the Ketchian side of our natures!

So *The Bloody Judge* offers 'classiness' amid lashings of low sleaze. In terms of dynamism and genuine action, the depiction of the Battle of Sedgemoor between King James's army and the Duke of Monmouth's rebels (often referred to as the last pitched battle between armies on English soil) is the most spectacular sequence Franco ever shot. With no expense spared, cannons by the score, and multiple soldiers on horseback, it's beautifully composed, expertly edited, and avoids the usual inexperienced extras flying through the air *before* the explosives go off. *The Bloody Judge* may exhibit Franco's usual pacing issues, along with some occasionally bizarre dubbing (listen out for a comic regional accent from *The Living Dead at Manchester Morgue*), but generally it's as shrewdly commercial a film as Franco ever made.

**Cast and crew:** Maria Röhm looks stunning here but she's strangely remote, putting the minimum of anguish into her role. Seeing her sister burnt as a witch she fails to dredge up a single tear, managing just a single "Oh no!". (But see 'Other versions'.) Howard Vernon on the other hand, modelling his performance on Boris Karloff's 'Mord' in *Tower of London* (1939), is evidently having a thespian's ball with the role of Jack Ketch. Looking like a cross between Marty Feldman in *Young Frankenstein* and Terry Gilliam in Monty Python's 'Spanish Inquisition' sketch, he exudes maniacal glee and the sadistic relish of the truly depraved. Also hamming it up like nobody's business are the dubbing artists in the English language version; their constant mutterings go well beyond the usual 'rhubarb rhubarb', turning every crowd scene into a medley of fatuous comments. For instance, when Judge Jeffreys is about to pronounce sentence on Alicia, a bible is

brought forward on a cushion in preparation for the solemn oaths of court: "Oooh, it's a bible!" someone twitters in the background. When Alicia confounds expectation by readily kissing the book, the same woman gasps, "Witches don't kiss bibles!" ... Hans Hass Jr. would soon be back in Franco's *X312: Flight to Hell* (1971). A handsome young pop singer turned actor, Hass was the son of a prominent German marine scientist and deep sea explorer. He released numerous singles between 1964 and 1974 (*Hibbedi Hibbedi Hey-Hey-Hey* anyone?) and scored his biggest hit in 1972 with a German-language version of the Don McLean hit *American Pie*. He frequently worked with his father, directing documentaries and travelling with him to deep sea diving sites, and in 1974 he starred in Harald Reinl's *Death in the Deep* aka *Deadly Jaws*, a drama based on his father's adventures. His last recorded work was an album of meditational 'chill-out' compositions called *Magic Mushroom* (2005); tragically he took his own life in 2006 at the age of 62 ... Note: Dennis Price was originally cast as Lord Wessex, a role eventually played by Leo Genn. A news article in *Variety* (April 1970) listed the cast as Christopher Lee, George Sanders, Pier Angeli and Jose Maria Parada; of these, only Lee would actually appear in the film.

**Music:** Bruno Nicolai once again pulls out the stops to create a belter of a score, with a shrill, threatening brass motif alternating with swooningly romantic strings. A tinkling harpsichord pops up here and there, suggestive of sinister plotting behind formal appearances.

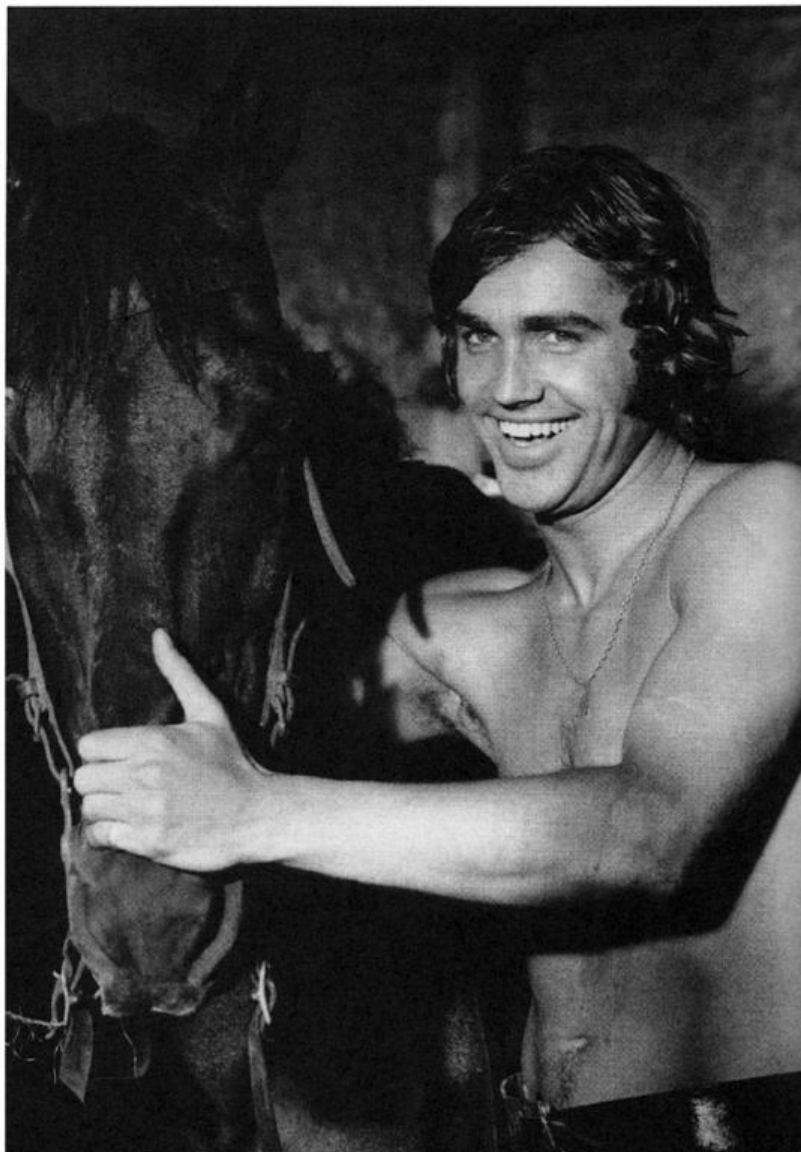
**Locations:** Many interiors were shot at the Conde de Castro Guimarães Palace in Cascais, Portugal, a location to which Franco returned again and again in the 1970s. Some interiors (such as those in the Bell public house) resemble the original Dr. Orlof residence. Battle scenes were shot in Casa de Campo near Madrid. Further location work took place at Leiria, Portugal.

**UK theatrical release:** Doverton Films submitted an abridged 81m34s version of *The Bloody Judge* to the BBFC where it received an 'AA' certificate on the 28 May 1974, with no actual censor cuts made. A video version running 89m19s was submitted by Redemption Films in 1999 and passed uncut. The definitive version currently available, running to 104m, is the Blue Underground DVD released in 2003. See Appendix for more details.

**Connections:** Born in 1645, George Jeffreys became Lord Chief Justice of England in 1683, an appointment given by the intensely unpopular King James II, whose reign of just three and a half years was curtailed due to his religious affiliation to the Roman Catholic Church. Jeffreys found favour with the King, and fought his corner assiduously: he earned the nickname 'The Hanging Judge' after he condemned to the noose around three hundred and twenty men who had fought against James II. These men were led by the Duke of Monmouth, illegitimate son of the previous monarch, Charles II. The trials became known as 'The Bloody Assizes'. Monmouth was captured and decapitated on Tower Hill by the notoriously brutal and inept executioner Jack Ketch. King James II was finally







Clockwise from top r: German pop sensation Hans Hass Jr., as The Bloody Judge's Harry Sefton; Jess Franco directs Hass and Maria Schell; Mary Gray (Maria Röhm) and Sally Downes (Diana Lorys) suffer at the hands of the vile Jack Ketch (Howard Vernon); Harry consults Mother Rosa (Schell); and seduces Mary.

deposed during the Revolution of 1688, and Jeffreys died of kidney disease in 1689 while in custody in the Tower of London ... In the film, Judge Jeffreys' repulsion when confronted with the violence to which he condemns prisoners is an extension of the George Sanders character in *The Girl from Rio*, this time played straight and with a moral point behind it; those who jeer for bloody vengeance in the name of morality are often the most squeamish when it comes to the grisly details. "You are all condemned for crimes against King and Kingdom. To hang; to dangle until you are but dead; to be then cut down still alive; to have your entrails drawn out and thrust into your own mouths; to be further hanged; then quartered, like the carcasses of beef you are." he snarls from the dock. With this in mind, Jeffreys' last words in the film are truly pathetic: "You were right, Wessex, I never knew...". This follows his revulsion upon seeing, from his prison window at the Tower of London, the hanging and quartering of another prisoner, understanding at last the grisly horror that issued from his pronouncements. (It's an ending with continuing relevance. When he was governor of Texas between 1995 and 2000, George W. Bush personally signed the execution warrants of 152 prisoners, more than any other governor in modern American history. He was accused (by critics such as Roman Catholic Sister Helen Prejean in her article "Death in Texas") of failing to give serious consideration to clemency requests, in some cases 'reading' them in half an hour on the actual day of execution. In the case of convicted rapist, robber and murderer Gary Graham, the Rev. Jesse Jackson challenged Bush to have the courage of his convictions and witness the execution, saying "If Governor Bush is convinced that Gary Graham is guilty, he should go with me to the site of the execution... He should witness it himself." Bush did not attend.)

**Other versions:** The sterling work done by Blue Underground's DVD makes elucidation of *The Bloody Judge*'s manifold variant releases redundant. We now have an almost perfect version, with the missing or 'clothed' scenes previously available only on terrible VHS tapes included as extras. These include a six minute interlude from the Spanish *El proceso de las brujas* in which Mary Gray, about to commit suicide in despair after the murder of her sister, is saved by Harry Sefton, whose shirtless appearance and winning smile coax her back from the brink of death. What a shame it's missing from the restored version; Hass looks stunning in these scenes and Röhm actually manages a tear for her dead sister. The German cut, a slim, not to say emaciated 76 minutes, includes all the sex and sadism but chops out vast swathes of dialogue, and opens with different credits (superimposed over witch-burning flames), followed by an image of Christopher Lee pilfered from a much later scene. Most English language editions prior to the Blue Underground DVD featured fully clothed retakes of Franco's preferred semi-nude scenes (for instance, when Maria Röhm and Hans Hass make out in a barn, there are no glimpses of Röhm's bush, thank-you very much). In some versions Judge Jeffrey's nightmare visions of torture are rendered less explicit by extensive use of dreamlike superimpositions.

**Problematica:** Original Italian onscreen credits list the following cast members who do not in fact appear in the film: Dennis Price, Herbert Fux, Serena Vergano and Giuly Garr.

**Press coverage:** Barcelona's *La Vanguardia* were appreciative: "This Spanish-German co production is directed by Jesús Franco, a director who specialises in causing sensation. Trying not to stray from the historical realities of the frightening theme, he resorts to extreme violence, cruelty, and sadism. [He] has used well the technical and artistic elements at his disposal to create an interesting film of artistic value. The outstanding group of actors and actresses involved in the film is a guarantee of excellence."<sup>1</sup> Others were not so kind, with ABC Madrid particularly cutting: "Among the many film genres, it is the historical that is the most plagued with difficulties and requiring the most resources and preparation in all elements involved, particularly from the director, as many masterworks are available to the viewer for comparison and contrast. For all the above reasons, the fact that a director such as Jesús Franco, so unfamiliar with this genre, has thrown himself with great audacity into the making of a historical film without the necessary resources to succeed is rather surprising. The result is an uninteresting film, plagued with puerile situations, topical characters, little battles in disorderly succession, interspersed with torture scenes that want to be horrifying but end up being only risible. The final balance is unfortunate. The film has some positive elements, among them the excellent photography, particularly outdoors, and well selected natural scenery."<sup>2</sup>

## NIGHTMARES COME AT NIGHT

**Liechtenstein 1969**

*Original theatrical title*

**Les Cauchemars naissent la nuit**

*Alternative titles*

**Nachtmerries komen's nachts** (Dutch-lang BEL theatrical)

**Nightmares Come at Night** (USA/UK DVD)

**Sangre en la noche** (SP DVD) *Blood in the Night*

**Pesadelos Noturnos** (POR DVD) *Nocturnal Nightmares*

**Les Yeux de la nuit** (FR shooting title) *The Eyes of the Night*

**Los ojos de la noche** (SP shooting title) *The Eyes of the Night*

note: there is no 'Liechtensteinian' version of the film

*Production company*

**Prodif Ets.** (Vaduz)

*Theatrical distributors*

**Stellor Films** (Brussels)

*Timeline*

First shooting period	circa September	1969
Second shooting period	January-February	1970
Belgium (Brussels)	18 January	1973

Theatrical running time

Belgium

85m

**Cast:** **Diana Lorys** (Anna de Istria, Princess of Utria). **Paul Müller** (Doctor Paul Lucas). **Jack Taylor** (Cynthia's lover, a playwright). **Colette Giacobine** [as 'Colette Jack'] (Cynthia Robin). **Andrés Monales** [as 'Andre Montchall'] (neighbour). **Soledad Miranda** [as 'Susan Korda'] (neighbour's girlfriend).

**Credits:** director: **Jess Franco**. screenplay & adaptation: **Jess Franco**. director of photography: **José Climent**. editor: **Nadia**. music: **Bruno Nicolai**. laboratory: **Telecolor** (Rome). colour by **Eastmancolor**. music publisher: **Sermi** (Rome). French version by **Paul d'Alès** and **Josiane Gibert**.

**Synopsis:** *Anna and Cynthia are in a relationship together, but Anna is unhappy; in fact she's on the brink of mental collapse. She confides her misery to her concerned therapist, Doctor Paul Lucas, and we see Anna's story unfold in flashback... She had been working as a strip-tease artist in a second-rate Zagreb strip joint, when one night her show was attended by Cynthia. At first Anna found the woman's intense scrutiny exciting. Her act grew more accomplished, and she began to display her body more and more erotically. Cynthia demanded that Anna move in with her, and soon the weaker woman was a virtual prisoner. Isolated in Cynthia's chateau, Anna began to suffer from nightmares in which she believed herself guilty of murder. Fearing that she was losing her mind she tried to confide in Cynthia, who remained distant and unsympathetic... Hearing all this, Doctor Lucas maintains that Anna is not insane but suffering some sort of breakdown. She needs rest, perhaps at a sanatorium. But can he be trusted any more than Cynthia?*

**Review:** An undertow of sadness soaks every moment of the excellent *Nightmares Come at Night*, a sort of minimalist 'drive the lady crazy' giallo told at half-speed. With slurred pacing redolent of narcotic surrender, it depicts the misfortunes of Anna (Diana Lorys), a lonely young woman working as a stripper, who falls under the spell of a wicked and wealthy female patron, Cynthia Robin (Colette Giacobine).

According to Franco, in an interview given in 1976, *Nightmares Come at Night* was his cheapest film to that point.<sup>1</sup> It is all the more impressive then that he achieves such an elegant, mournful atmosphere, telling his story at the same dreamy pace as his classic erotic horror tales *Succubus* and *Venus in Furs*. Although the zoom lens is beginning to make its presence felt, there remains a deliberate, stately quality to the film. On the downside, one could say it lacks enough dramatic meat, and it's also rather airless: there are only a handful of speaking parts, and the majority of the film revolves around the two women and their doctor, Paul Müller, whose role in the mystery is perhaps too easy to anticipate. That very airlessness, though, becomes a strength as the film progresses. It's clearly quite deliberate on Franco's part: for instance, Cynthia

keeps caged birds in a glass ceilinged room in which they're allowed to see the sky but never go outside, which underlines the motif of confinement and claustrophobia.

*Nightmares Come at Night* opens with one of those curious 'give away the plot' montages that occasionally popped up in Spanish and Italian films of the period (cut together, it must be said, confusingly enough to do little more than alert the ticket buyer that bared breasts are on the way). The post-credits scene, with Anna in bed, writhing in the toils of a nightmare, marks the beginning of a visual trope Franco would use over and over again in the 1970s and 80s; a sleeping squirming woman assailed by disturbing dreams, in this case an erotic encounter that ends with her apparently garrotting her male partner. Also pushed to the foreground is lesbian eroticism; while not pornographically explicit, sapphic sex is openly filmed, with visible pubic hair and prolonged groping of breasts. Franco clearly never intended to sell this film in Spain; he knew it was destined for France and Belgium, territories where such imagery could be spared the censor, so he decided to push the boundaries. In a sense it's his first 'private' (as opposed to 'personal') film. Made cheaply with no producer as such and just a handful of actors, shot in a week with no guarantee of release, it exudes a sense of pure experimentalism, inaugurating the 'time-stretching' cinema Franco would later hone in such outstanding works as *Shining Sex* and *Das Bildnis der Dorian Gray*.

This may be a film with few narrative 'events' but one set-piece deserves special mention; an extraordinary strip sequence lasting over seven minutes. It's distinguished by a ruminative voice-over, exploring the nature of seduction, the strip-tease phenomenon and the deferral of gratification as an end in itself, that could speak for Franco's entire oeuvre in erotic films: "*I had to focus the spectators' attention as long as possible, with a strip that lasted forever. The boss wanted me to last most of the evening ... Anna he used to say, I don't care how you do it: show them all you've got, but take your time, and when they think it's over, do it again, make it last longer, it excites them [...] and so I did what I could. I invented lascivious moves, eccentric pauses...*" It's also an extraordinary psychological exploration of love and obsession; a stripper who's been growing bored with her act until a desirable client pays her special attention. Flattered and eager to please, she engages more deeply with the performance. Who is hypnotising whom? Is Anna mesmerising Cynthia with her stage act, or is Cynthia's obsessive gaze causing Anna to sink deeper and deeper into her observer's power? It is of course the latter, and as such it works as a metaphor for the way abusive partners gain insight into the psychology of their victims, drawing out of them all their secrets, their fantasies and private emotions, whilst remaining cool and detached. "*Those eyes didn't leave me,*" Anna says, "*I didn't know exactly what I felt. A pleasure, but tense: almost discomfiting, like a sickness.*" Of course for the uninitiated it's simply a boring scene with a woman trailing a feather boa up and down her tits, and if that's the case for you then you're safe from the Franco virus. For now. But if you can feel something stirring, some wordless fascination,



some exotic temporal enigma on the tip of your consciousness, then you know you've caught that strange 'discomfiting sickness' that will haunt you through your next hundred Franco films...

When two new characters pop up, forty-five minutes into the film, one feels excitement. Who? What? Where? It's a shock to the system. There they are, grooving away to a delicious French library LP while Anna slouches on a sofa in a revealing nightie, watching with an opiated smile. Soon, with the pitter-patter of bongos to spur her on, she's up on the table dancing: in one of those 'only in a Franco film' moments she gets tangled up with three large, low-hanging paper lampshades, giving the whole scene that awkward air of reality which other directors would mistake for bad composition and swiftly 'correct'. The newcomers disappear into another room and make out, whereupon Anna is hypnotically compelled to murder them with a spear. Sadly, Franco misses out on the chance to shoot the very first double impalement of a couple having sex (Mario Bava won that accolade two years later with *Twitch of the Death Nerve*); we see Anna advance with the spear in her hands but the scene fades to black. Another stand-out sequence occurs when Anna bumps into a visiting playboy friend of Cynthia's (played by Jack Taylor). Feeling bored and frustrated after Cynthia falls asleep during sex, he turns his charms on Anna and the two of them go on a 'journey of the imagination' together, with just a light flashing on and off in a darkened room for special effects. Where is the flashing light coming from? Who's operating it? Is playboy Jack just flicking the switch of a table lamp out of shot? If so he has very long arms. The intent seems Expressionist, representing the state of mind of his characters. "*Everything will be as clear as your eyes*" Jack promises, as we gaze incredulously at another of Franco's stubbornly out-of-focus shots of Diana Lorys, whose eyes are in fact so blurry we can scarcely tell if she's looking at him. Did Franco do this on purpose? After all, nothing is 'clear' for poor Anna...

Subtle touches abound: the suppressed kiss that Dr. Lucas almost gives Cynthia in their first scene together, hinting that the two are in cahoots; Lucas's pious refusal to discuss Anna's problems during their church rendezvous until the (unseen) liturgical ceremony has finished. Anna's protestation that she has "*never been Anna, Princess of Istria*", an at first seemingly random but in fact well-placed token of displaced or fragmented identity; Istria (don't worry, I had to look it up as well) is a peninsula located on the Adriatic Sea between the Gulf of Trieste and the Bay of Kvarner, a territory shared by three countries: Croatia, Slovenia, and Italy. Poor confused Anna: is she a stripper, the princess of a divided principality, or both? She - and we - will never know.

Despite the cinematography being credited to José Climent, Franco's hand on the camera is evident throughout. If you're in any doubt just look at the first long scene in Doctor Lucas's car, filmed from the back seat as Paul Müller and Diana Lorys occupy the front. The camera wanders in and out of focus, initially unsure whether to grip onto Paul Müller's jacket or to aim for the

dashboard. With admirable insouciance (or a pressing knowledge of how little film stock was left), Franco lets the scene continue almost entirely out of focus as the two characters drive down Portuguese country lanes. I'm aware that these apparent technical shortcomings can drive certain viewers crazy, and yet, hand on heart, I treasure the subsequent scene in which Anna and Dr. Lucas discuss Anna's sanity, filmed through a windscreen with so much daylight reflected off the glass that you can barely see Anna's face, intercut with perfectly clear close-ups of Dr. Lucas from *inside* the vehicle! It's the shot/counter-shot sequence from hell, and it goes on for nearly three minutes. I'm sorry, doubters, but there really *is* a kind of insane bliss to moments like this! Later, however, he creates gorgeous, mesmerising compositions that are incredible by anyone's standards: check out the scene in which Cynthia asserts her dominance over Anna as the two women stand in a hallway between two large mirrors, their reflections bouncing off into infinity. The use of mirrors is inspired: we're seeing the vortex of desire exerted by Cynthia, with a sense that all is exposed, with nowhere to hide. Both front and behind echo endlessly in plain sight. It is now that two-faced Cynthia unveils her aggression ("*This time her tone changed, she was hard, ironic, bitter*"), so it's fitting that she should be visible from both angles. Cynthia is so strong she need hide nothing; Anna is so weak she cannot hide anything. At the climax of the scene the camera zooms deep into the reflections and, in perfect focus, observes Cynthia slapping Anna across the face. The slap is a violation of intimacy and trust between lovers, so the intricate use of reflections conveys the psychological depth at which the pain has been inflicted.

It's a pleasure to be reminded that Franco can stir your tender emotions as well as your lusts and fears. *Nightmares Come at Night* is soaked in a delicious sadness that seeps, like an insidious narcotic, from the screen. Franco's hand-held camera style, his slow pacing, his oneiric repetition, the brilliant use of music, the abstraction of bodies, the skill of the actors, lead you into charged spaces and places of the mind unlike any other. ("*Suddenly it seems like everything has another proportion ... another dimension...*") *Nightmares Come at Night* belongs in the mesmeric upper-echelon of Franco titles. It may lack the complexity and overt cleverness of *Succubus*, but on the other hand the characters are played straight - there's no satire or craziness, no comic cameos or stylistic frivolity. What matters to Franco here is the spirit of a girl broken by the selfish will of another. It's the flipside to his Sadean films in which the virtuous are surrendered with a zeal the Marquis would have admired. Anna is weak, it's true, but she's a gentle, poetic, needy soul, ill equipped to deal with the concentrated malice of her 'lover'. Trapped between nightmares and the wickedness of the world, she can no longer cope. Franco regards her lonely predicament with sorrow, demonstrating a softer side to his filmmaking that would not surface again until *Sinner: the Secret Diary of a Nymphomaniac* (1972).

**Cast and crew:** Handsome Andre Montchall (real name

Andrés Monales) makes his Franco debut here, sporting a pencil moustache and lounging around with his shirt off, playing possibly the laziest jewel thief ever committed to film. He would go on to make a total of six films with Franco between 1969 and 1972 (the most prominent of which is *Vampyros Lesbos*, in which he's cuckolded by a lesbian vampire) before disappearing from the industry. His scenes in *Nightmares Come at Night* were shot at the same time, and in the same house, as those he contributed to *Eugenie* (1970); Soledad Miranda appears with him here, just as she does in that film, and the two of them never interact with the rest of the cast. As for Soledad herself, she first speaks fifty-three minutes into the film, and her opening line will raise a bitter smile if you're not enjoying the movie ("Is this going to last forever?"). Despite her minimal contribution to the film, most DVD and Blu-ray releases headline her name, which does at least show the extent to which Soledad Miranda's cult status has grown over the years (notice that she isn't even mentioned on the film's only existing theatrical poster). Also reappearing, after his Franco debut in *Succubus*, is Jack Taylor, playing an amusingly pretentious character I like to think of as the playboy twin of his mystic poet in the later *Female Vampire*. Colette Giacobine follows her brief appearance in Franco's *Eugenie... the Story of her Journey into Perversion* with this meatier role as Cynthia the predatory lesbian; although she is convincingly icy and cruel she seems not to have worked much afterwards, with a small role in Franco's *Count Dracula* (as Greta the barmaid) and a brief turn as Mark Lester's murdered mother in *Night Hair Child* (1972), plus an obscure Spanish comedy about an all-woman football team by Pedro Masó, director of the sleazy Koo Stark vehicle *Los adolescentes* (1975).

**Music:** Bruno Nicolai gives Franco another top-drawer movie score, which is a godsend for a film made so incredibly cheaply. The two men were firm friends by now; perhaps Nicolai agreed to waive his fee? *Cauchemars* boasts music as mesmerising and sinister as *Venus in Furs*. One piece in particular, which accompanies a disturbing yet dreamy lovemaking session between Anna and Cynthia, fosters that intimate suspension of time that Franco brings to his purest cinema. An arrangement for bass guitar, electric piano and organ, it hovers with delicate precision for nearly three minutes, stepping through a shifting progression that always sounds tantalizingly 'off'. Without being simply discordant, it creates subtle unease, a sense of indefinable danger simmering out of sight – but not quite out of mind. It accompanies some of Franco's most lyrical photography of lovemaking; the camera angles, the lighting, the editing and the pacing invoke a hazy oneiric mood which reminded me of scenes from Robert Altman's superb psychological horror film *Images*. Another great composition features a twanging sitar, accompanied by eerie synthesiser and xylophone. Interestingly, the music that plays during the prolonged strip club scene sounds more like Daniel White and Jess Franco than Nicolai, as do a number of later cues.

**Locations:** Spain and West Germany.

**Connections:** The story revisits elements of *The Diabolical Dr. Z*, with a female predator posing as a theatrical impresario turning an impressionable innocent into a killing machine. The rapid credit montage of 'giveaway shots' from the film is a technique Franco would repeat for his 1973 film *La noche de los asesinos*. Caged birds as symbols of confinement recur from *Succubus* and *99 Women*. The film also has a lot in common with the film *Orgasmo* aka *Paranoia* (1969) by Umberto Lenzi, starring Carroll Baker as a woman driven crazy by a trendy young couple who use her weakness for sex and booze to drive her off her rocker; also in the Lenzi film, a trusted figure turns out to be implicated in the chicanery. (Coincidence? Commonwealth United released *Paranoia* in the US, after having worked extensively on-set with Lenzi!)

**Other versions:** According to Alain Petit (who remembers once seeing five reels of the film at the office of Comptoir head honcho Robert de Nesle) this was released only in Belgium, Switzerland and Canada<sup>2</sup> ... The English language dub heard on the Shriek Show DVD (and subsequently the Redemption Blu-ray) was done much later, specifically for the digital release: at one point Jack Taylor's character refers to Robert De Niro, who did not become a household name until 1976's *Taxi Driver*. Still, the fact that this version includes a genuine onscreen credit for the "version française" suggests that an English version may have been made, indeed perhaps for all the Prodif titles...

## COUNT DRACULA

Spain, Italy, West Germany, Liechtenstein & UK 1969

Spanish depósito legal number: B-43.119-70

Italian visa number: 62939

*Original theatrical title in country of origin*

**El conde Drácula** (SP)

**Il conte Dracula** (IT)

**Nachts, wenn Dracula erwacht** (GER) *At Night, When Dracula Rises*

**Bram Stoker's Count Dracula** (onscreen USA/UK)

note: there is no 'Liechtensteinian' version of the film

*Alternative titles*

**Les Nuits de Dracula** (FR theatrical) *Nights of Dracula*

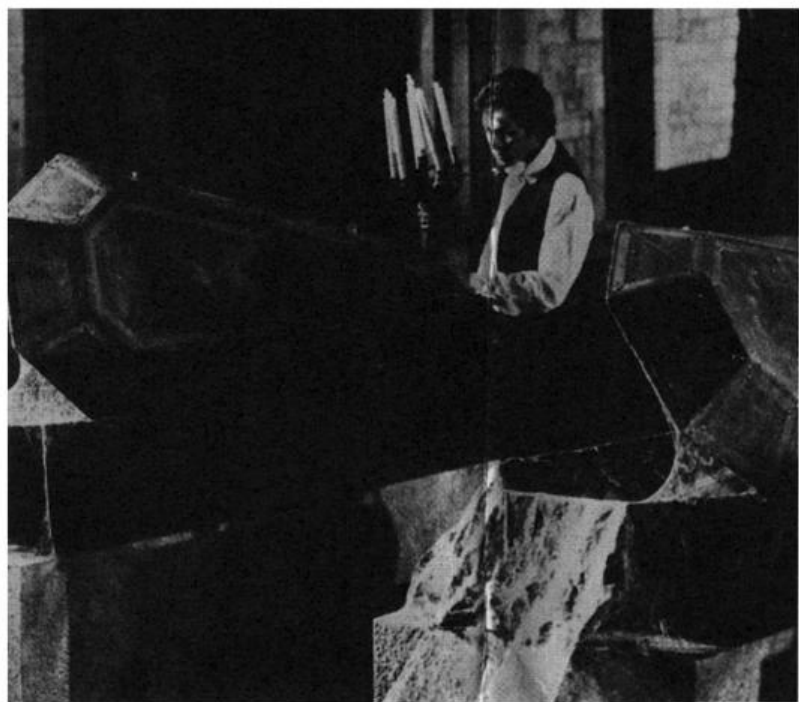
**Dracula Den Blodtörstige** (SWE theatrical) *Dracula The Cruel*

**Verenhimoinen Dracula** (FIN video) *Bloodthirsty Dracula*

**De vloek van Dracula** (NL video) *The Curse of Dracula*

**Dracula** (shooting title)

**Dracula '71** (AIP retitling reviewed in *Cinefantastique* Winter '71)







*Production companies*

**Fénix Films** (Madrid)  
**Filmar Compagnia Cinematografica** (Rome)  
**Corona Filmproduktion** (Munich)  
**Towers of London** (London)  
 © 1970 **Établissement Sargon** (Vaduz) [English-language prints]

*Theatrical distributors*

**Warner Bros.** (Madrid)  
**Filmar Compagnia Cinematografica** (Rome)  
**Gloria-Film Verleih GmbH** (Munich)  
**Hemdale Film Distributors Ltd** (London)

*Timeline*

Shooting date	Oct - 5 December	1969
West German certificate	01 April	1970
West Germany premiere	03 April	1970
Barcelona	16 November	1970
France	01 January	1971
Belgium (Gent)	04 February	1971
Seville	10 March	1971
Madrid	15 March	1971
UK 'X' certificate issued	17 November	1971
USA		1973
Italian visa number issued	1 September	1973
Turin	03 November	1973
Rome	24 July	1975

*Theatrical running time*

Spain	86m
France	93m
West German	93m
UK	96m32s

*"Count Dracula is back! The most gruesome and bloodthirsty character! A shocking film that immerses the viewer into the world of panic, fear and dread." - Spanish admat*

**Cast:** **Christopher Lee** (Count Dracula). **Herbert Lom** (Professor Abraham Van Helsing). **Klaus Kinski** (R.M. Renfield). **Maria Röhm** (Mina Murray). **Frederick Williams** (Jonathan Harker, a lawyer). **Soledad Miranda** (Lucy Westenra - called "Westerna"). **Jack Taylor** (Quincey Morris, Lucy's fiancé). **Paul Müller** (Doctor John Seward). **Franco Castellani** (Seward's orderly). **Jesús Puente** (Home Secretary). **José Martínez Blanco** (man on train). *uncredited:* **Emma Cohen** (brunette vampire woman). **Moisés Augusto Rocha** (Van Helsing's servant). **Jeannine Mestre** (blonde vampire woman). **Colette Giacobine** (Greta, housekeeper). **Jesús Franco** (attendant at the Van Helsing clinic).

*Credits:* directed by **Jess Franco**. story: **Bram Stoker** / **Erich**

**Kröhnke** [as 'Erik Krohenke'] [IT prints]. screenplay by **Harry Alan Towers** [as 'Peter Welbeck'] / **Augusto Finocchi** & **Jess Franco** [SP prints] / **Augusto Finocchi** [IT prints] / **Erich Kröhnke** [GER prints]. director of photography: **Manuel Merino** / **Luciano Trasatti** [IT prints add]. editor: **Derek Parsons** / **Bruno Mattei** [SP prints]. art director: **George O'Brown** / **Karl Schneider** [SP prints]. music composed & conducted by **Bruno Nicolai**. produced by **Harry Alan Towers**. executive producer: **Arturo Marcos Tejedor** [SP prints] / **Alexander Gruter** [IT prints]. presented by **Alexander Hacoheh** [IT prints]. production manager: **José Climent** / **Frank Rintestein** [IT prints add]. location managers: **Fernando Quejido**, **Francisco Gutierrez**. unit manager: **Rino Gadducci** [IT prints]. assistant director: **John Thompson** / **Giacomo Gramegna** [IT prints]. continuity: **Ana María Settimó de Esteve**. camera operator: **Javier Pérez Zofio** / **Idelmo Simonelli** [IT prints]. camera assistant: **Alberto Prous** / **Enrico Fontana** [IT prints]. still photography: **Máximo López**. set dresser: **Emilio Zago** [IT prints]. costumes: **María Luisa Panaro** [IT prints]. make-up: **Ricardo Vázquez**. assistant make-up: **José Luis Vázquez**. hair stylist: **Adela del Pino**. sound editor: **Joyce Oxley**. laboratory: **Fotofilm, S.A.**. clothing supplied by **Peris Hermanos**. film stock: **Eastmancolor - Kodak**. negatives: **Foto Film** (Madrid) [IT prints]. prints by **LV di Luciano Vittori** [IT prints]. sound recording: **Elio Pacella** [IT prints]. music publisher: **Sermi** (Rome) [IT prints]. *Spanish version* post-synchronization: **Arcofón, S.A.**. *Italian version* sound re-recording by **Cinefonico Palatino** with the participation of **S.A.S. - Società Attori Sincronizzatori**. *uncredited:* based on the novel "Dracula" by **Bram Stoker**.

**Synopsis:** Jonathan Harker visits Transylvania to arrange a real estate deal with a client, Count Dracula, who lives in a gloomy old castle surrounded by a forest in which wolves roam. He is greeted by the Count, who tells him of the rich and bloodthirsty history of the Dracula family. They discuss Dracula's intention to move to England, and Harker suggests a secluded property on the outskirts of London. That night, after being startled by a bat at his bedroom window, Harker explores the castle basement; there he is set upon by three vampire women. The Count intervenes and saves him. Fainting away, he regains consciousness in his room. Finding himself locked in, he climbs out of the window and discovers a crypt beneath the castle containing several coffins; in one of them lies Dracula. In panic, he jumps out of a window ... Harker awakens back in England where he is being cared for by Doctor Seward, at a clinic run by Professor Van Helsing. One of Seward's patients, Renfield, spends a lot of time observing Carfax mansion, directly adjacent to the asylum. Harker's girlfriend Mina and her close friend Lucy arrive to take care of him. When Lucy faints at the sound of the lunatics screaming, Van Helsing suggests the two women stay and rest at the clinic. That night Lucy hears a voice and walks outside, towards Carfax. Unbeknown to the others, she's attacked by Count Dracula; Carfax is in fact the house that Dracula bought from Harker's firm. The next day Lucy is weak

and semi-conscious. Van Helsing sends for her boyfriend, Quincey Morris, who rushes to her side. For the following two nights she is visited in her room by the Count. Lucy dies the next day, and after her funeral she appears as one of the undead, seducing and attacking a child in a public park at dusk. When Van Helsing reads of the child's death in the morning paper he guesses that Lucy is responsible. With Harker and Morris he visits Lucy's tomb; the coffin is empty. The three men lie in wait, and when Lucy returns to her coffin Van Helsing drives a stake through her heart and Morris chops through her throat with a spade. Realising that Dracula now resides at Carfax, Harker, Seward and Morris break in to confront him. They are attacked by stuffed animals, after which Dracula appears before them, rejuvenated. He disappears when Harker brandishes a cross. At a meeting with the Home Secretary to discuss Dracula, Harker, Morris and Seward receive a note from Mina informing them that she's gone to the opera. The ticket she believes to have been sent by her fiancée was actually sent by Dracula. Before the men can get to her she's attacked by the vampire and bitten. The Count then pays a menacing visit to Van Helsing before leaving for Varna in Bulgaria. From there he is transported in a crate of earth back to his castle. Renfield, who is psychically linked to the Count, manages to say the word 'Varna', giving Seward the clue to Dracula's whereabouts. Harker and Morris realise that if Dracula is travelling home by sea, they can get there first by land. Van Helsing stays in England to take care of Mina while Seward tends to Renfield. In Transylvania, the two young men enter Dracula's castle and stake the female vampires in their coffins. When Dracula's crate passes by on the road below, carried by gypsies, they drop a massive boulder which kills three of them. Harker and Morris then set fire to the vampire in his crate. As the flames lick his flesh, Dracula is destroyed.

**Production notes:** In October 1969 Franco began shooting his most ambitious film of the 1960s: *El conde Drácula*, an adaptation of Bram Stoker's classic *Dracula* (1897). His decision to tackle the most famous Gothic novel of them all began as a genuine attempt to create a faithful vision of the text; however, circumstance mutated it into something wilder and woollier along the way. It received terrible notices from the critics of the day, who could scarcely be blamed for taking potshots given all the pre-release ballyhoo about authenticity. Over time, *Count Dracula* has gained a more appreciative audience who see it today through the prism of Franco's own career, and enjoy it for what it is rather than what it was allegedly trying to be, but at the time the film was an embarrassing flop for all concerned.

Working alongside Harry Alan Towers and Christopher Lee on his recent *Fu Manchu* films, it was perhaps inevitable that Franco would turn his attention to the subject of Dracula; besides which the Hammer films were still a potent commercial force in 1969 and the most recent at the time, *Dracula Has Risen from the Grave* (1968), was one of the highest grossers in the company's history.<sup>1</sup> Speaking to *Vampir Magazine* in December 1976, Franco explained the roots and development of his taste for Gothic horror: "First of all I admire the German expressionism of the silent film era.

I like *Nosferatu* by Murnau, Fritz Lang's early films. Also Dreyer's *Vampyr* and Epstein's *Fall of the House of Usher*. Or the bizarre film by Christensen, *Witchcraft Through the Ages*. But then I also love the American horror film ... Tod Browning, James Whale, and the works of less renowned directors such as Erle C. Kenton and Rowland V. Lee. Unfortunately, these 'B-movies' died around 1950. Few have done this sort of film since, excepting Roger Corman, whose work I greatly appreciate. But I cannot reconcile myself with the Hammer style. It's the reconstruction of a baroque world in a way that seems very cool and distant. One cannot compare *Dracula* by Terence Fisher with that of Tod Browning. I think the reason is that none of the people from Hammer really love this type of film. They are pure technicians without personal interest in the horror movie, they shoot these movies to make money. Even the actors, Christopher Lee for example; I know that he does not like this kind of movie."<sup>2</sup> In fact Christopher Lee's interest in *Dracula* was considerable – as long as one is referring to Bram Stoker's book. His reservations were to do with the versions made by Hammer (although he would go on to make four more *Dracula* films with the studio, each less 'authentic' than the last). It was Lee's dissatisfaction with the Hammer films that led him to discuss with Franco and Harry Alan Towers the idea of doing a faithful adaptation...

**Review:** One of the most curious films in Franco's career, this prestige production, announced to the press as a faithful literary adaptation, fails to negotiate the formidable hurdles it sets for itself. Instead it creaks and splits at the seams, allowing some of the chaos and weirdness of Franco's personal cinema of the 1970s to leak out a year too early, and in entirely the wrong setting.

On first viewing, it's easy to make sport with Franco's efforts. For every moment that works there's an element that doesn't; for every atmospheric grace note there's a bathetic raspberry. For an audience brought up on the Hollywood horrors of the 1930s, or the stylistically foursquare Hammer films of the 1960s, Franco's production, beset with financial problems and corner-cutting camerawork, can look ramshackle and half-baked. As the screen adaptation of a fairly long book, *Count Dracula* bites off more than it can chew, a fact that would matter less if the film had not been trailed to the press as the first authentic adaptation of Stoker. Sadly it was this hubris (emanating, it must be said, from producer Harry Alan Towers more than Franco) that signed the film's critical death warrant.

Taken on its own terms, *Count Dracula* (or *Bram Stoker's Count Dracula* if you prefer) is enjoyable and sometimes atmospheric, especially in its early stages, but it's still an oddly muted film. There's a coolness of emotion that feels borne of self-consciousness, as if Franco were aware of genre history looming at his shoulder. Somewhere along the line the scares seem to have leaked out of this classic horror tale, leaving a preponderance of starchy collars and stiff dialogue. The difficulty of adapting the novel saps the drama; purely as a piece of cinema one has to say it sags. Most of what



works is concentrated into the first thirty minutes, after which the dominant sensation is of a slowly sinking ship, with industrious technical effort and a 'don't panic' attitude failing to maintain the required buoyancy. Events that ought to be fraught with dread feel drained of life instead: like Stoker's gradually fading Lucy, the film finally succumbs to a devastating listlessness.

It falls to even the most sympathetic reviewer to compare *Count Dracula* with its source, a process that inevitably results in a litany of criticism. Some scenes are strikingly similar to the book; many more are either unnecessary inventions, or grievous alterations... In the opening minute, Jonathan Harker encounters a man on a train who seems to anticipate his troubles before they even speak. Their subsequent dialogue is an addition to the book, though not an unjustified one given that the first passages of Harker's journal contain little dialogue. The warning from an innkeeper's wife regarding St. George's Night is broadly accurate, although she's a nameless old woman in Stoker and a comely blonde called Greta here. In the carriage en route to the Carpathians, Harker refers to their journey through the Borgo Pass, in line with the book's description. Harker's change of conveyance, from a populated horse-drawn coach to a solitary seat in a carriage from Dracula's castle, is simplified - the sinister driver who picks up Harker in the film does not speak to the frightened occupants of the other carriage. Instead, Harker is left alone to wait in a gloomy forest glade for the second coach. If we're to believe that the coach-driver is Dracula himself, wrapped up with a scarf to conceal his appearance, then his first line occurs here: "*The night is cold, and my master the Count bade me take all care of you.*" (The book merely implies that this is Dracula; the film makes it clear with a shot of Christopher Lee's eyes.) Harker's journey to Dracula's castle is a beautiful fog-wreathed affair, and yet Franco dubs tropical birdsong over it. The howling of wolves, which accompanies some effective shots of Harker cowering in the carriage, is swiftly undercut by the appearance of the beasts themselves - clearly just Alsatian dogs gambolling along in high spirits. Arriving at the castle, Harker dismounts from the carriage and the coachman drives off, leaving the visitor alone at a giant wooden door. Here, the fact that we know Christopher Lee was the coachman leads to a moment of unintentional comedy. A mere eighteen seconds after the carriage has driven away, Harker's knock at the door is answered by Dracula: grave in mood, grey of hair, and holding a candelabra. The unfortunate effect is to make you imagine the Count dashing round to a back entrance, tearing off his coat and scarf, grabbing a candelabra and composing himself for a second, before answering the door as 'himself'. Lee's first line as Dracula is almost word for word from the book: "*Welcome to my house. I am Dracula. Enter freely of your own will.*" (The middle sentence is added, unnecessarily in my view, to respond to Harker's question, "*Are you Count Dracula?*") Dracula's lines about the servants having gone to bed, his undertaking to see to Harker's comfort himself, and his invitation to supper, are close to the original

text. However, in order to hasten the passage from Dracula's facade of courtly manners to the revelation of his monstrosity, Franco has Harker notice a mirror in which the Count fails to cast a reflection. This of course contradicts the book; there are no mirrors in Castle Dracula. In Harker's room, the clichés of vampire cinema take precedence; Dracula's hospitality is supposed to be impeccable, yet thick cobwebs swathe the bedroom and big black spiders clamber on the four-poster bed. Meanwhile, the repeated use of excruciatingly unconvincing bat shadows is like something from a child's Halloween pageant. Several nights' worth of encounters between Harker and Dracula are boiled down into one major dialogue scene, but it's a brilliant one: Dracula's reminiscence of the might of his bloodline and its crucial role in his nation's historic battles against the Turk, the Bulgar, and the Lombard. This speech is nowhere to be found in previous screen adaptations, so it's a rare delight to encounter it here. Soon after, we reach the most famous line of all, as Dracula hears wolves howling in the forest outside and says, "*Listen to them - the children of the night. What music they make!*" Lee is marvellous here, but the filming is execrable. Franco opts for a zoom into Christopher Lee's face, heading first for his eyes, and then, as if having a crisis of judgement, sliding down to his lips. It's an awkward readjustment that completely sabotages the moment. (Why not simply a close-up? Surely for such a key moment we need to see the eyes and mouth together?) The sequence in which three vampire women attack Harker after he falls asleep in a crypt is accurate to the book: the key line, "*He is young and strong; there are kisses for us all*", is drawn directly from Stoker, as is Dracula's furious, "*This man belongs to me!*" In a moment of horror neglected by all previous adaptations, the Count gives the vampire women a baby in a brown cloth sack as replacement for Harker. Wisely, however, no attempt is made to visualise the scene in which Dracula crawls like a lizard down the castle walls, an effect which, on a budget like this, would probably have involved corny sideways-tilted shots in the style of the *Batman* TV series. Escaping from his locked room, Harker enters the crypt and finds the coffin in which the Count lies sleeping. Fleeing in terror, he leaps from a high window...

At this point the story moves to England, where Harker awakens to find himself under the benign care of Doctor Seward. "*Your body was found in a mountain stream, 200 kilometres from Budapest,*" he's told. They are in Professor Van Helsing's private clinic, "*Not far from London*". The script is naturally striving to simplify Stoker's complex narrative, but the effect is to pile all the major players into the same vicinity at the price of plausibility. Stoker's Van Helsing was a resident of Amsterdam, called in by his ex-student Dr. Seward as a consultant in the case of Lucy Westenra; here he actually runs the clinic to which Harker is brought, and which lies next door to the Carfax estate Harker advised Dracula to buy! (To be fair, Stoker is partly to blame; with the exception of Van Helsing running the place, this convenient coincidence comes directly from the book.) Harker bears a vampire's bite on his neck, which

Van Helsing sees immediately. However, Harker never shows the slightest sign of vampiric influence; the bite is there purely to tip off Van Helsing. In the book it's Lucy who's the victim of the first bite, and whose wound and consequent anaemia alert Van Helsing, but that bite occurred in Whitby in a major plot digression snipped from the film. The asylum also houses a patient of great interest to Dr. Seward; the fly-eating maniac Renfield, played by Klaus Kinski. Unfortunately, Kinski's otherwise convincing performance is undermined by the shadow of the camera rig passing across him as he roams his padded cell. Renfield hardly speaks (though in the book he speaks often) and there's no attempt to explain what he hopes to achieve by eating insects. Among other changes, Lord Godalming, the suitor who wins Lucy's betrothal in the novel, is removed in favour of Quincey Morris, the novel's unsuccessful suitor. Morris is an American in the novel; here he speaks like one of the English gentry, which makes you wonder why they bothered to change him (perhaps the American theatrical release was dubbed differently?). Meanwhile Seward's importance is reduced primarily to his relationship with Renfield. In the most irritating scene of the film, various stuffed animals (including, incredibly, an ostrich) are brandished clumsily at the camera by an out-of-shot props man, as if they're 'coming to life' prior to the Count's appearance. The scene is nowhere to be found in Stoker, and it's all the more annoying because it diminishes the dignity of Christopher Lee's arrival, resplendent at last with rejuvenated black hair. In a different context one could find this bizarre use of stuffed animals amusing and anarchic; here it feels like self-sabotage, as if Franco has ceased to take the story seriously.

From hereon, drastic steps have been taken to compress Stoker's text, and various unnecessary elements have been imported from previous screen adaptations: for instance, Mina is tricked by Dracula into visiting the opera with a ticket sent for her in Jonathan's name, something which never occurs in the book and owes its presence here to the 1931 Tod Browning film. Mina is bitten by the Count, but her psychic link with him, which in the book Van Helsing uses to track the fiend, is dropped. Instead, it's Renfield who reveals Dracula's destination, breaking his silence with a single word, "*Varna*". Mina may as well have been removed altogether, so unimportant does she turn out to be; Franco and Towers could easily have condensed Mina into Lucy, making the latter Harker's girlfriend instead. ("*You have become not only a nurse, but a servant,*" says Van Helsing when Mina brings him tea, and it pretty near sums her up.) A newly written confrontation between Dracula and Van Helsing begins well, with Lee's stealthy entrance from deep shadows into the living room light, but a cross burnt into the wooden floor with a hot poker curtails too soon what should have been a thrilling face-off. This is the last major scene for Van Helsing: in the book he goes to Transylvania with Harker and Morris where he stakes the vampire women. In the film he never leaves London; Harker and Morris stake the vampire women and deal with Dracula. (Herbert Lom must have been available only

for the studio scenes in Barcelona; Dracula's crypt was filmed on location 250 miles away, at the Santa Barbara Castle in Alicante.) Finally, the destruction of the Count is fumbled: instead of Harker cutting the vampire's throat with a Nepalese knife while Morris stabs him in the heart, the two men simply set fire to his crate! There's an impressively grotesque make-up effect of the Count's burning face, but Franco fluffs the ending with a bland 'hero shot' of Taylor and Williams staring down at the flames.

The production of *Count Dracula* was beset by difficulties that would have tried the patience of any director, so we must bear this in mind while watching the results. According to Franco, Harry Alan Towers knew that Christopher Lee would never consent to work on the film if he thought the production was cheap and shoddy, therefore all the scenes in which Lee appeared were properly financed. This meant ensuring plenty of money to keep the great man wine and dined in the manner to which he was accustomed. Once Lee left the shoot, though, the remainder of the film was shot on drastically reduced funds. Franco says that he ended up putting his own money into the production because Towers could not provide the necessary cash.<sup>3</sup> Considering that the most shambolic, zoom-happy camerawork occurs during Harker's trip to Transylvania, and during the climax at the Santa Barbara castle in Alicante, my guess is that these scenes were shot after Lee returned to England. Franco, hard-up and no doubt deeply fed-up, had to shoot the rest himself, and the emotional as well as financial burden shows.

Fortunately, other aspects of the production are more successful. The music is truly outstanding (see below) and the location work and set design are often gorgeous, especially for Lucy's bedroom at the hospital, dominated by strange baroque windows that resemble giant eyes. It's as if, by letting Dracula enter through these portals, Lucy is granting him access to her soul. Christopher Lee looks simply wonderful, and his determination to play Dracula as an old man who's rejuvenated as the story progresses makes you wonder why on Earth no one had attempted it before. The violence is sparing, but you do get Jack Taylor shoving a spade through Soledad Miranda's neck, and I have to say I was also enchanted by the sight of our redoubtable heroes Quincey Morris and Jonathan Harker chucking boulders at the gypsies carrying Dracula's casket back to the castle. They kill three men, which means their onscreen body-count is higher than Dracula's. Way to go, forces of goodness!

Ultimately, *Count Dracula* fails to escape the gravitational pull of the Hammer cycle, and not just because Lee is in the lead role. Franco may balk at the comparison, but *Count Dracula* is clearly influenced by the Hammer films. It's moving in on their patch, and Towers and Franco know it. This is not a true adaptation of the Stoker novel; instead it borrows the clothes of the Hammer Gothics and then digresses when it finds them restrictive and uncomfortable. More than any technical gaffe, it's the straitlaced seriousness of the film *Count Dracula* is trying to be that causes trouble. It seems to chafe against Franco's playful sensibility.

Significantly, having tried and failed to tackle the British Gothic head-on, Franco's subsequent and far more stimulating forays into classic horror imagery were either total re-thinks (*Vampyros Lesbos*; *A Virgin among the Living Dead*) or surrealistic comic-strip fantasies (*Dracula*, *Prisoner of Frankenstein*; *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein*). The criticism which raged after the film's release must surely have hurt him, bullish though he could be about reviews. One would need a skin like a rhino to ignore the scornful pinpricks about technical shortcomings and failure to live up to the hype that greeted *Count Dracula*. Franco, however, was not deterred. Instead he began to stir the same Gothic ingredients into a bubbling cauldron of ideas heated by his own unique sensibility. Stoker's characters - Dr. Seward, Van Helsing, Harker, Renfield - turn up again and again in his later films, but they surrender their original moorings and float in an oneiric fantasy world, where Gothic tropes merge with the surreal, the sexy and the very, very strange. It's in *that* netherworld, not the vexed and limiting territory of literary adaptation, that Franco would find his true home.

**Franco on screen:** Franco plays a manservant and coach-driver for Van Helsing's clinic.

**Cast and crew:** Soledad Miranda makes a striking and gorgeous Lucy Westenra, and one wishes she'd been given more screen time. According to Franco, she also made a positive impact on the hard to impress Christopher Lee; despite the young woman's untutored thespian background he expressed genuine admiration for her performance. Lee was himself disappointed by the film but not entirely dismissive, and he took the time to explain his views on the increased eroticism of Franco's approach to a Spanish newspaper: "*The interpretation of Dracula equally entailed a sexual problem: blood, a symbol of virility, and sexual attraction have always been closely linked to the universal theme of vampirism. I have tried to suggest this without destroying the role by awkwardly overloading it. Above all I have not forgotten that Count Dracula was a 'gentleman'.*"<sup>14</sup> In his autobiography *Lord of Misrule* he asserted: "*Count Dracula made [...] by Jess Franco in Spain, and outside the Hammer aegis, was a damn good try at doing the Count as Stoker meant him to be. It was made with the deepest of bows to the theatre manager who invented the character. In the whole vast Dracula industry it was virtually unique in that. It was a shadow of what it might have been, but nevertheless it had the right outlook on the protagonists.*"<sup>15</sup>

**Music:** One aspect of the film for which there is no need of excuse is Bruno Nicolai's wonderful score, a magnificent Gothique explosion of sinister brass, shuddering strings, and what sounds like either a hammered dulcimer or a zither (quite similar instruments, except the former is more commonly used in orchestras). Dominated by a grand but threatening melody line for trumpet and lower brass (probably E-flat horn), with the dulcimer adding creepy chromatic interjections, the string section plucks an almost Bernard Hermannesque pattern around which a flute or piccolo, and a malign cor anglais, caper like demons snickering through the shadows.

**Studios:** Filmed at Estudios Balcázar (Barcelona). Klaus Kinski's scenes were shot at Tirrenia Film Studios in Pisa, Italy.

**Locations:** The Castillo de Santa Barbara, Alicante; Barcelona (including the 'Barrio Gótico' [Gothic Quarter]) and Munich (West Germany). For Dracula's castle the exterior long shots were taken in France (second unit), with close-ups and interiors in Alicante. The castle is an imposing edifice that eschews the cartoonish Gothique of popular imagination, and Franco was right to avoid a more rococo choice: Stoker's inspiration was the isolated Slains Castle in Scotland, a sober affair for all its dramatic and sombre location.

**UK theatrical release:** Submitted to the BBFC by Hemdale Distribution as *Bram Stoker's Count Dracula*, at a running time of 96m22s, the film received an uncut 'X' on the 17 November 1971.

**Connections:** A scene in which Lee is importuned by a prostitute offering "a little fun" stands out, firstly because it's somehow intrinsically amusing for a hooker to approach Count Dracula, and secondly because conflating Dracula with Victorian prostitute murders creates a link to Franco's future *Jack the Ripper* (1976) ... "*It's strange to finally confront the Prince of Darkness himself*" says Professor Van Helsing towards the end of the film: Franco would confront him again in the weird and wonderful *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein* (1972) ... Shot at the same time as *Count Dracula*, on the same sets and locations, was *Cuadecuc, vampir* by the Spanish experimental filmmaker Pere Portabella. (The word 'Cuadecuc' means 'worm's tail' in Catalan, and also refers to the unexposed 'tail end' of a film reel). Many have heaped praise upon this artfully shot black and white oddity which observes the shooting of *Count Dracula*, but it's often at Franco's expense. His efforts are denigrated while the avant-garde Portabella is lauded. Before noting that Franco himself loved Portabella's film, and promising that I'm not simply 'sticking up' for Franco against 'snooty art critics', I must say that I personally find *Cuadecuc, vampir* a grinding bore for much of its 75 minute running time. Admittedly shot in very beautifully processed black and white, to me it's a mildly interesting effort which outstays its welcome by at least half an hour. Much of the soundtrack is totally silent (an affectation I find insufferable), with mild relief provided by some rudimentary electronics. As a peep behind the curtain to see Franco at work (and a chance to observe Soledad Miranda smiling and relaxing on set) it has some value; as a piece of avant-garde cinema I find it parasitic, ponderous and massively over-rated.

**Other versions:** The Dark Sky DVD release of *Count Dracula*, which comes up on screen as *Les Nuits de Dracula*, is missing between ten and seventeen seconds of material from the opening shot, which ought to pan from a winter woodland to Dracula's castle. Also missing is a title card announcing "Transylvania 1897". More importantly the print omits a scene in which a gypsy woman stands outside the castle walls, pleading for Dracula to return her baby; as a result of this omission the baby turns up as a non-sequitur when Dracula gives the infant to the female vampires as



replacement for Harker. Other differences include a blue tint to scenes during the carriage journey, while a shot of gypsies carrying the empty coffin of Dracula seen from the window of Harker's room at Castle Dracula – dark and undecipherable on video – is now brightened up considerably and accompanied by a music cue stolen from Miklós Rózsa's score for *Spellbound*. The end credits add a stream of Italian names purely to fiddle the Italian co-funding arrangements. This is therefore the Italian version (*Il conte Dracula*) in all but title-card.

**Problematica:** *Obsession* adds the following unconfirmed credits: co-screenplay Milo G. Cuccia, Dietmar Behnke and Carlo Fadda; co-editor Gabrielle Reinecke; make-up Gerry Fletcher; Christopher Lee's make-up Stuart Freeborn; costumes José Marilli.

**Press coverage:** Spanish coverage of the film was mixed. *El Mundo Deportivo* declared the film, "A very estimable tripartite co-production under the directorial baton of our compatriot Jesús Franco ... who orchestrates a terrifying new adventure of the mythical character. Count Dracula, vampires, dark Carpathian castles, storms and creepy fog, eerie howls and also the classic wooden stakes and strings of garlic that, according to the superstitions of Transylvanian peasants, are the only two weapons to fight off the vampires, do not miss their date with Jesús Franco, who, with unquestionable technical mastery, manages to make use of, and even abuses, this whole range of topics ... creating a climate of fear and anguish that goes so far as to fray the nerves of much of the audience and to entertain the remainder."<sup>6</sup> *ABC Andalucía* were less complementary: "In keeping with new trends, erotic nuances have been added to the horrible myth, complicated with sexual perversions, and using the new resources of colour ... Jesús Franco, an erratic director, has made use of Stoker's story and of one of the most famous interpreters of the character, Christopher Lee, who, unfortunately, is seen in this new film alongside actors of 'westerns' and action films. The result does not fit with the cinematic lineage of the theme. Jesús Franco's *Dracula* is well below its predecessors. The construction is crude; the director forgets the story. As in so many mediocre horror films, an excess of truculence means the terrifying becomes grotesque."<sup>7</sup> *Variety* were equally brutal, calling the film "clumsily constructed", describing its claims to authenticity as "pretentious" and bemoaning the style and execution: "Director Jesús Franco goes wild with zoom shots ... Kinsky [sic], Lom and Lee are competent in their parts, but rest of cast is lapidary [sic], and direction, lensing and scripting are unredeemably [sic] inept."<sup>8</sup> And in the UK's *Monthly Film Bulletin*, the response was 'more in sorrow than in anger': "Disappointingly unimaginative ... Christopher Lee consistently underplays the role to the point of losing the ferocity he displayed in [Terence] Fisher's movie."<sup>9</sup> Finally, *La Stampa*'s critic assumed a lofty tone of familiarity but tripped at the last hurdle: The ingredients used (coffins that creak open, marble tombs from which the dead emerge, victims bitten on the neck by the deadly fangs of the protagonist on the night of the full moon [...]) are made purely academic in this low profit "horrific" exercise, in which the only character unprecedented for the genre is an expert on magic (Herbert Lom), who strives to mitigate as much as possible the atrocities of the count."<sup>10</sup> Er, th

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Life was now good for Franco. He had homes in Paris and Rome, between which he alternated along with his wife Nicole and stepdaughter Caroline Rivière (Nicole's daughter from a previous marriage). Determined to do things his own way, he wasted no time brooding over recent problems. Instead, he took the Marquis de Sade's short story *Eugénie de Franval* and crafted a script that reflected his ambitions far more accurately than his recent Sade adaptations for Towers. The film was a stunning tour-de-force called *Eugénie*, aka *Eugénie de Sade*. Franco and cameraman Manuel Merino began shooting in Berlin, with Paul Müller and Soledad Miranda, during the extreme wintry weather of January 1970. After a couple of weeks, having accumulated enough material to show potential investors (and having also bagged a few extra scenes for *Nightmares Come at Night* at the same time), he turned to Eurociné for completion money, leading to a further shoot in Paris. Judging by the grey skies and leafless trees in the Paris footage, the French material must have been shot fairly soon after the German, probably no later than March 1970.

**Review:** *Eugénie* is one of the most important films of Jess Franco's career. It addresses many of the concerns that would propel his work in the years to come, and places centre-stage the blend of amorality, fear and desire for which he would become notorious. Opening with a stunning scene depicting the two lead characters filming a snuff sex movie in an anonymous bedroom, this is Franco unchained, taking his love of de Sade way beyond the Harry Alan Towers productions to a different level entirely. Throwing open the door to his most twisted fantasies, *Eugénie* is the utmost vindication of his decision to go it alone, leaving behind the safe harbour of Towers's B-movie empire and setting sail for a dark continent far more personal and challenging.

The credits appear over shots of Soledad Miranda stripping and fondling a young woman on a hotel bed. The mood is cheerful; the two women are laughing, totally at ease. The hand-held camera is clearly wielded by a participant in the unfolding drama, yet despite the airiness of the female interaction, and the blissfully relaxing score by Bruno Nicolai, we sense that some kind of secret code is in play. Without missing a beat or breaking the mood of intimate sensuality, the cameraman swaps places with Miranda: she disappears to hold the camera, while the male, played by Paul Müller, takes up where Miranda left off. The blonde woman accepts the switch with a jokey wave at the lens, as if pretending to be embarrassed. Then she dissolves into laughter. Is she drugged, or merely drunk? Bruno Nicolai's music glides serenely on as Müller proceeds to strangle her. The victim realises her predicament and struggles in vain. In one of Franco's most haunting shots, the camera lurches forward as Müller glances up and regards the lens. His icy gaze blasts into the audience, but it's not meant for us: it's intended for the dark-haired woman behind the camera. Nevertheless, we feel it. It's as though the actor (or the killer) is addressing us directly, asking 'Is this the kind of thing you want to see?'

There's another person involved in this dance of death. Intercut with the unfolding scene is a man watching the footage, which is being projected in a private viewing theatre. As the woman dies, so *Eugénie*'s credit sequence ends. The man waves a hand at the projectionist to switch off the film. This fellow, watching a 'snuff movie' for reasons we don't yet understand, is played by Jess Franco himself. Audiences at the time were unlikely to realise that this lank-haired, bespectacled figure was actually the director of *Eugénie*, but nevertheless, nowadays we *do* know, and though it may play like a private joke, it's a joke with resonance, rather as the home movies watched by the psychotic central character in Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* take on an extra level of irony when we learn that Powell himself chose to play the cruel father in the Super-8 footage.

Franco's role in *Eugénie* is the most fascinating of his many acting parts, with only Mathis Vogel in *Exorcism/The Sadist of Notre Dame* coming close. It's an extraordinarily frank admission of his own relationship to his fiction, as well as a provocation to our own. Franco is watching footage that he himself shot, while playing a man watching real life murder with amoral fascination. The character doesn't flinch, he doesn't cry out, he shows no sign of outrage or nausea. He simply smokes a cigarette, watches the footage, then departs. Refracted light from the projector sunbursts around him, and we wonder if maybe he's just the director of a horror picture, reviewing the day's material. Or perhaps he was the cameraman all along? After all, we don't actually *see* Müller when he hands over the camera to Miranda; she just disappears from view behind it while Müller appears a second or two later. Copious shadows fall upon the bodies in the brightly lit hotel room, so there could be a *fourth* player in the room. This of course is the truth, in a manner of speaking - Franco is indeed 'actually' holding the camera, and casting a shadow, even though in the narrative it turns out that Miranda and Müller filmed the killing. These opening few minutes refuse to answer our questions and leave open a multitude of possibilities.

As the murder footage ends, another man enters the viewing theatre and informs the watcher that 'she' is awake and can receive visitors. It gradually becomes clear that what we've been watching is, in diegetic terms, 'snuff footage' filmed by a young woman called Eugénie and her father Albert Radeck, who have murdered an innocent woman for kicks. Franco plays a character called Attila Tanner, a writer and intellectual obsessed with the couple, who's been studying the film for his own reasons, having presumably been granted access by the police.

However, in order to fully understand all of this we must watch another hour of the movie, and this is what makes the opening sequence so daring. In *Eugénie* Franco sets out to disquiet us with what we're seeing, and only gradually does he elucidate his position regarding the morality not only of 'screen violence' but the real life acts upon which it feeds. There can be no shrinking from the implications - Franco is a scholar of the Marquis de Sade and

the seedy/nasty/sexy/vicious antics of his characters stand for more than just fleeting titillation. It's this self-awareness and reflexiveness that separates him from other filmmakers of his generation such as Joe D'Amato, who ploughed a similar furrow at times but lacked a self-conscious amoral philosophy.

At Eugenie's hospital bedside, Tanner informs the semi-conscious girl: *"I'd like to write a book, based on your father's life. I'd like to understand him. He's a human being, as we are. I need to know everything. You've got to tell me everything about him."* Eugenie answers that she will do so on one condition. *"Kill me."* Tanner wants to 'understand' Radeck, to grasp the humanity of a killer. He extends his intellect to the greatest outcast in civilised society, the psychopathic murderer and sadist. Is Tanner a fraud, drooling over the grisly details while posing as an objective scholar? A Sadean amoralist would say that Tanner wants the excitement without admitting his own desires; his mind is infected with bourgeois restraint, preventing him achieving his true will. Instead he's opted for a voyeuristic second-best: a scholar of horrors, lapping vicariously at the wounds made by others. Eugenie's challenge, asking Tanner to kill her, to commit murder in return for spilling the beans about the murders, is adroit indeed. This is the taunt Eugenie makes from her weakened position. Give me what I want – murder me – and I'll tell you what you want to know. Tanner, if he wishes, can pass the whole deal off as a 'mercy killing'.

From here, the film plays out as a giant flashback, depicting Albert and Eugenie Radeck, their illicit love affair, and their embarkation on a string of murders. Eugenie's calm voice-over explains the blissful isolation of a life spent alone with her father in their remote country abode (Eugenie's mother, we are told, died two days after giving birth to her) and then moves on to the subject of his scholarly pursuits: *"These last few years, his interest focussed mainly on eroticism, on erotic writers, on erotic traditions throughout the world, and throughout the ages. He also studied all the sciences involved with eroticism."* This idyllic depiction of what Eugenie calls *"our quiet and peaceful life"* is extremely unusual for a Franco movie and raises fascinating questions about his approach to the home. The more Franco films you see, the more you notice that the home is almost entirely absent from his storytelling – and when it does appear, there's often the complicating element of incest in the mix. *"Life was a permanent dialogue between my father and myself,"* says Eugenie. This brings blasphemously to mind the Christian notion of living in constant union with God. Bruno Nicolai's diaphanous music adds the blessing of angels to the incestuous yearnings of Eugenie, blessings also bestowed by the filmmaker in an interview for the Blue Underground DVD release (*"I think it's a wonderful relationship!"*). However, at the time the film was made Franco found himself in the same bind as the previous *Eugenie* film for Harry Alan Towers: having to pretend that the Radecks are stepfather and stepdaughter. It's obvious what the reality of the situation is – but as Franco says, *"I couldn't do that anywhere in the world at the time."* For the purposes of this book, though,

I'll dispense with the limitations of the 1970s and refer to the characters as Franco intended: father and daughter.

Eugenie's interest in 'lustmord' involves a slow ballet of awakening passion. Her voice-over calmly discusses her father's work, and the erotic books in his library, in a tone that would be equally appropriate to Egyptology or Renaissance painting. However, when we see her reading one of these 'works of eroticism', rather than talking about them, the truth is revealed; her manner is one of suppressed excitement, sexual arousal. As she flicks the pages she drinks deeply from an erotic wellspring of lust and murder. After Radeck notices that Eugenie has put a book about sadistic sex back on the shelf in the wrong position, he assures her he's not angry but pleased that she's ready to know of such matters. The teenager retires to her room, leaving the door open and writhing almost nude on her bed, simmering with desire in full view of her father. *"I never would have imagined that our conversation could end this way. I felt as if I'd been jolted into another form of reality, and better yet, that I'd had the revelation of my father's true nature. I felt that he had put himself within my reach. We had created a form of complicity."* The scene ends with Eugenie's father closing the bedroom door, but not, as it turns out, on their burgeoning romance. As if to ensure that both he and she are literally and figuratively on the same page, the following day he leaves out a book for her to read while he's at work. It tells of incest between father and daughter, and murder. Returning that evening to find her immersed in the text, Radeck's response is deepest joy: *"Eugenie, you've just discovered life's deepest purpose, the quest, the grail mankind has sought throughout the ages: ultimate power over human beings. Yes, the power which comes from the pleasure of giving pain, living each moment with intensity and awareness while they suffer. You'll find out that the key to life is nothing but your own pleasure. You'll be amazed to find out that pleasure is always at someone else's expense. We'll carry this to its ultimate expression through wounds and blood and death. I know you'll love every moment of it. You'll revel in the secret knowledge of having done something savagely beautiful but forbidden."* Totally in love, and burning with lust, Eugenie swoons *"Your will shall be mine; we'll act as one."*

And so, as de Sade's libertines boast in *The 120 Days of Sodom*, *"From words we passed to deeds."* Setting out to commit a motiveless, undetectable crime, Radeck travels with his daughter to Paris. After first establishing their presence at a nightclub, they leave and quickly fly to Brussels (roughly an hour's journey), murder an innocent random victim, and then return the same evening to the same club. To the other guests, it's as though they've been there all night. All the while, Radeck elaborates his criminal theories to Eugenie: their victim must be chosen at random on the spur of the moment, and instead of skulking around suspiciously they will draw attention to themselves, hiding in plain sight. This latter principle leads to a vision of comical excess: Eugenie adopts a ridiculous garb – thigh-length red leather boots, an enormous red leather hat and cape, capped off with enormous white-framed sunglasses! In a scene that ensures we appreciate the delicious

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absurdity, Franco's camera lingers in real time in the bathroom as Eugenie hurriedly changes from her regular outfit into this crimson monstrosity. Then, in a perfectly judged comic moment, she exits the ladies' to be met by her father, who's dressed in *equally* outrageous fashion, with tartan trimmings! (Proving the efficacy of the method, a newspaper article about the murder mentions only "a bizarre couple dressed in red".)

The murder itself plays with the iconography of sadomasochism and shows how people can be all too willing to surrender themselves to photographers. Choosing a young woman (future Franco star Alice Arno) to pose for some 'modelling shots', the Radecks take her to a hotel room, and after snapping a few S&M themed photos they murder her. It's a great idea; however, at this point I have issues with the way Franco stages the murder. Essentially, the woman's death is conveyed in the same stylised way as the fake photo-shoot leading up to it. Franco really should have altered the visual approach here, moving from obvious theatrics to flat, unvarnished realism. The final shot of the dead woman's face bears no more terrible a trace of the ravages committed against her than the pseudo-S&M photos Radeck took. The dead body sprawls, eyes open, with a smear of bright red paint on its face. By neglecting to make a distinction between levels of reality, Franco misses an ontological beat here, failing to draw a distinction between pseudo-shocking sadomasochistic porn and genuine sex-murder.

Soledad Miranda is quite stunning in the film, and Franco waxes lyrical about her in the dialogue, dedicating a panegyric in the guise of a party-hopping fool trying to pick her up at a cocktail party: "You look like a Madonna by some Florentine painter," the young hopeful declares, "An even earlier painter, Guadalupe for example, maybe a Flemish master like Roger van der Weyden?" Eventually her suitor realises: "You're not listening, are you? Ah, the mystery that is woman. Such eyes, limpid yet enigmatic. Women are such an unfathomable mystery until you lift their many masks. Of course some women, when you lift their mask, you decapitate them. But not you... I can tell there's genuine mystery about you." Eugenie excuses herself from this litany of romantic anxiety with the tiniest smile. She's been concentrating on her father across the room, who looks back with private complicity. Franco suggests here that the feminine mystique, as insisted upon by centuries of male prose and poetry and adumbrated by classic German and Hollywood cinema, may be nothing more profound than the sting of unavailability. If a beautiful woman doesn't want sex, she's 'mysterious': mystery is just a fig-leaf for the bruised arrogance of the unsuccessful suitor. In the case of Eugenie, she cares nothing for other men because she has her father. With this totemic male between her legs, she has no need of party-sharks and their opportunistic discussions of art, beauty and philosophy. Incest, freely entered into by both parties, cuts through the bar-room chatter of desire and liberates the lovers from convention, ushering them into a forbidden yet sacred space.

It's at this party that Eugenie meets Attila Tanner for the first time. Tanner is an aficionado of Albert Radeck's writing, and asks

for an introduction. (It's worth noting here that Tanner is wearing a garish red jumper that perfectly matches the outfits worn by the killer couple earlier, a detail which suggests Tanner is a great deal closer to the Radecks than we might think...) What follows is one of the most pivotal scenes in a Franco movie, in which Tanner, Eugenie and Radeck discuss the latter's work and ethics. Tanner asks about the extreme opinions recently expressed in Radeck's work. When asked to explain the apparent hardening of attitude between two differing works separated in time, Radeck explains that he holds to the more recent, having changed as he's grown older. Far from mellowing, he's become more serious about the amoral philosophy in his books. Tanner notices an unmistakable erotic undercurrent when Eugenie says she agrees with her father "passionately". The following exchange is worth quoting in full:

Tanner: "I see. I've often wondered about the nature of your relationship. I should have guessed. But I tend to beware of my imagination, my mind plays the weirdest tricks on me, that's why I'm glad you clued me in."

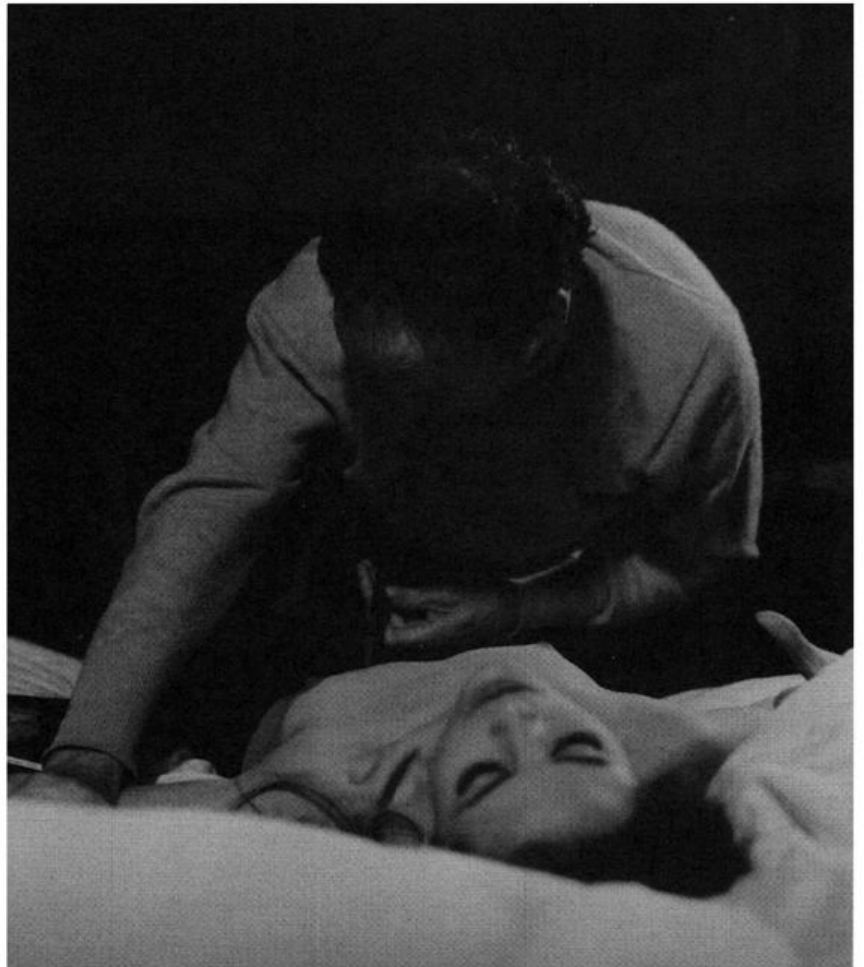
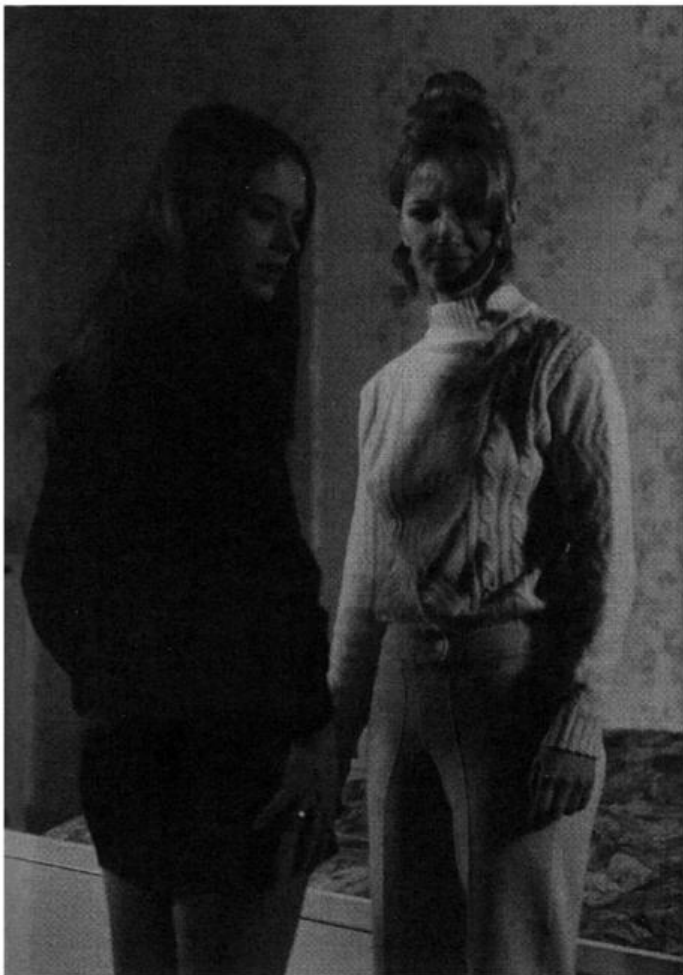
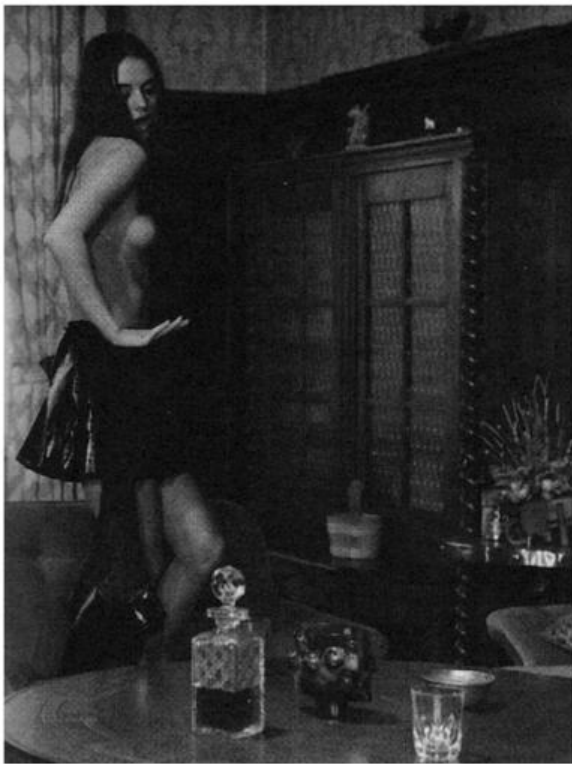
Eugenie: "We didn't tell you anything Mr. Tanner."

Tanner: "No, of course. You didn't come out and say you were lovers. But I warn you; from now on I'm going to keep a close watch on you, and everything you do. I must say, I'm very much interested in your schemes. There's nothing unhealthy or moralistic about my curiosity, a writer needs to dip into genuinely extravagant characters to give texture to his own."

Radeck: "You can watch us to your heart's content."

Here we find Franco (as Tanner) discussing, with an imaginary perpetrator, the allure of the Sadean concepts to which he returns again and again. It's as if he's crossed over the threshold of the screen to talk with his characters. What emerges from the film is a statement of his approach to Sade's philosophy. He's aware that to live a Sadean lifestyle involves stepping totally outside of man-made law, and while he may personally lack the nerve to do so, he is a curious student of those who follow this philosophy into action. He admits that he's something of an armchair Sadean (he wants to study the Radecks, not join them or emulate them), but at the same time he does not sit in judgement. There is nothing "moralistic" about his interest. "He's a harmless maniac," says Radeck to his daughter afterwards. Eugenie concurs: "He's a highly refined intelligence. Much like us. He understands us." The closest thing to a moral judgement comes when Tanner 'bumps into' the Radecks in Berlin as they head off on another 'adventure': "You are smart Mr. Radeck, in fact so smart that one day you'll outwit yourself. Life always gets back at those who despise it." This isn't even a moral statement as such, we're into metaphysics; the hand of fate, the irony of objects, the magical symmetry of creation and destruction. These are the forces that will cook Radeck's goose, not the police or some flash of lightning from Heaven.

The next killing takes the form of a drinking game with a giggling victim, a hitchhiker, described as "idiotic" by Eugenie. She



Eugenie (Soledad Miranda) performs a sexy dance for her father and their next intended victim ... Radeck (Paul Müller) grows weary of Tanner (Jess Franco) and his constant snooping.  
n: A production still with Soledad Miranda and the unknown actress in the opening 'snuff film' credit sequence ... Radeck attacks his daughter with a knife after learning of her betrayal.





muses about a further eight killings, five women and three men (one of which is presumably the snuff film murder we saw at the beginning). Already, it would seem, slaughter is becoming routine. And so the story enters its final stage, where unfortunately it falters. Radeck's plan, for Eugenie to seduce a cynical young musician called Paul and then drive him to suicide with emotional cruelty ("You're going to bewitch him right out of his life!"), would have made a far better ending had Eugenie followed through. As it is, she has a sudden change of heart, so convenient and unexplained that the story fizzles. Instead of tormenting Paul to an early grave, Eugenie falls in love with this bruised romantic, with his radical politics and student hard-on for Che Guevara. The story never quite manages to get inside the conflict between Eugenie's amorality and her sudden bout of conscience. The only explanation that fits the facts is that she's been weak all along, allowing her father to exert complete control over her views and actions. I find this interpretation of Eugenie's character unsatisfying. Franco claims in the DVD interview that he likes creating multi-faceted, or at least 'two-sided' characters<sup>2</sup> but the connective tissue that could sell this Janus-faced ending is absent. I simply don't believe in this version of Eugenie. A sadistic murderess, entwined in a passionate love affair with her equally murderous father, suddenly falling like a bubbleheaded schoolgirl for the first good-looking young dope she meets? The transition is simply not sold to us: where is the psychology, Jess? When interviewed, Franco said that distributors thought the film was too dark, too perverse, and so it sat on the shelf unreleased for several years (it eventually scored a Parisian release in 1974). This still doesn't explain why the ending is such a total volte-face; I regard it as a significant flaw in the writing. We need to know more about Eugenie's inner life in order to believe the disavowal of her father and all he stands for. Her love affair with Paul destroys the purity of the Radecks' incestuous bond, leading to murder, vengeance with a pair of scissors, and suicide. Eugenie, we are led to believe, has 'come to her senses' through the love of a good man. The wickedness, the amorality, the will to destroy, the commitment to libertinage at all costs, disperses like sea mist. And so the film, in its own peculiar way, becomes a cautionary tale of corruption redeemed, with a totally conventional moral schema. ("No one is beyond love and redemption," says the trailer, adroitly picking up on the theme.) An evil, selfish father corrupts his innocent daughter, a fate from which she is eventually saved by the love of a 'decent man' (self-pitying and humourless, but 'decent'). Surely this is not what Franco wished to convey! The Sadean elements are so committed, so fully integrated into the rest of the story, that the finale feels unnatural and insincere. A more fitting end would see Eugenie kill her too-controlling father during sex, realising that the true libertine must work alone and set her own agenda. *Eugenie*, therefore, is a flawed Franco film, but in this case it's so close to greatness that it's agony to see it fall apart in the last five minutes. Imagine if Eugenie decided to destroy Paul not because her father told her to, but because she genuinely found

him pathetic and stupid? Imagine if she then realised that her father's instructions were surplus to requirement, that the student had no further need of the teacher, and so killed him too! Truly, *Eugenie* would be a black masterpiece. Perhaps the producers flatly refused to release a film with a 'down' ending in which wickedness goes unpunished or worse yet, is celebrated? Whatever: it's a fluffed ending. The rest of this strange and disturbing film, however, echoes through one's mind long afterwards.

*Eugenie* is unlike any previous Franco film. Its minimalism, its purity of purpose, its darkness and perversity, strip away the trappings of horror, the lushness of Euro-erotica and the pretensions of art cinema, leaving only the core of his sensibility. It's a film of the 1970s, whereas even the best of Franco's 1960s films were somehow wedded to the demands of an older kind of cinema. Until now, Jess Franco had been testing his mettle against the various genres he loved as a boy, learning how to make movies commercially, swiftly, and imaginatively. With *Eugenie*, however, a change occurs. The break with the past will not be a clean one - there are still a few stragglers and exceptions to come, especially in 1970 and 1971. But in general, from here on, Jess Franco - the Spaniard who made a splash with musicals and spy stories and occasional horror flicks - settles down to shape something more precisely his own. He has honed his skills, chosen his themes, tasted freedom and discovered the particular mood of dark, mesmeric eroticism that he will summon again and again in the years to come. In the 1960s Franco learned how to make movies. In *Eugenie*, he learns how to make Jess Franco films.

**Franco on screen:** Franco's role is dealt with in detail above. It's a shame that the choice of dubbing artist for the English language version is so inappropriate. Tanner should sound insinuating, sardonic - a little sly. Instead, he's a booming macho baritone!

**Cast and crew:** On the subject of Soledad Miranda, Franco told Blue Underground's DVD interviewer, "*When I made Dracula with her, I thought Oh my God, I can do all those young De Sade characters with her!*"<sup>3</sup> ... According to Franco scholar Robert Monell, Paul Müller was unhappy with the film at the time: "[He] informed me that the January 1970 shoot was in chaos over the lack of funds and the fact that the director was also filming at least one other project simultaneously, not to mention that there was no completed script, only last minute pages handed to the cast after Franco had scribbled them on set."<sup>4</sup> ... Alice Arno makes her first of many appearances for Franco here. She would become an essential member of the Franco repertory cast during the quickfire productions of 1973 ... In a rare onscreen appearance, Eurociné head honcho Marius Lesoeur can be glimpsed as the man who leans into shot and whispers to Tanner while he's viewing the Radecks' snuff footage ... The comedian telling awful gags on stage at the club where the Radecks establish their alibi is Franco's friend and sometime producer Karl Heinz Männchen, whilst cameraman Manuel Merino (slightly out of focus to the left of the screen, with neatly trimmed sideburns) can be seen in the audience.

◀ Radeck and his teenage daughter Eugenie seduce and murder Kitty (Greta Schmidt), then - are you sure you're over 18? - they make out together.

**Music:** The soundtrack by Bruno Nicolai is dominated by a sweet, sad, wordless melody which defines the film as thoroughly as Daniel White's theme for *Female Vampire* three years later. It's the sort of music that will swim soporifically around in your head for days after watching the film, so be careful not to operate heavy machinery afterwards, and try not to throttle any fashion models... Among the other cues, there's a mesmeric piece for piano, bowed cymbal and atonally sliding strings as Eugenie lies in hospital; an ominous Morricone-influenced piece for drums, piano and muted trumpet during the murders of Arno and Greta Schmid; and a jittery razor-wire string section set against tumbling jazz drums for Radeck's final act of violence.

**Locations:** Shot in Berlin and Paris, with the Radeck residence a few kilometres outside Berlin. The house where Paul and Eugenie conduct their affair can also be seen in *Nightmares Come at Night* (Montchall and Miranda play lovers in that film too – the scenes for both films were clearly shot simultaneously, with pick-ups for *Cauchemars* done during the *Eugenie* shoot.) When the Radecks visit Berlin, they attend the same locations we saw in Franco's *Succubus*, specifically a modern pedestrian bridge across Tauenzienstrasse, overlooking the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church (known to Berliners as the Gedächtniskirche). The footbridge is no longer there, but the raised shopping complex overlooking the Church, where the Radecks are approached by Tanner, remains. Note: this is one of the rare Franco films *not* to be set by the sea – a frozen lake stands in for the usual seascapes. Attila Tanner visits Eugenie at the Martin Luther Hospital ['Krankenhaus'] in Berlin at 27-31 Caspar-Theyß-Straße. On their foray into France the Radecks stay at the grand old Hotel D'Iena in Paris. For the murderous fashion shoot, the victim is seduced in what looks very much like a sound studio dressed to resemble a photographer's studio; there are cork tiles on the wall, of the sort used for flattening room ambience in recording environments. Was the sequence perhaps shot in the film's dubbing theatre? Scenes at the model agency were captured at the Paris offices of Eurociné, indicating that they were added later, after the Lesoeurs came on board.

**Connections:** *Eugenie* is the third of Franco's adaptations of de Sade, following *Justine* and *Eugenie... the Story of her Journey into Perversion* ... This time the source material is 'Eugénie de Franval' (a short story first published in Sade's 1799 collection *Les Crimes de l'amour, Nouvelles héroïques et tragiques*) ... Paul is the third of Franco's doomed trumpet players, following Julius Smith in *La muerte silba un blues* and Jimmy in *Venus in Furs*. Yet another trumpet player will fall foul of a disturbed young woman in Franco's *Al otro lado del espejo* (1973), while the drinking game played by the Radecks also turns up again in that film ... On the wall of the model agency where the Radecks pick up one of their victims is a poster for the Eurociné film *Paris Inconnu* (1968), a mondo-style documentary about Parisian nightlife which also starred Alice Arno. It was directed by Pierre Chevalier, who often

worked for Eurociné, making much the same type of film as Franco but with no discernible artistic and aesthetic dimension. Chevalier's films are terrible (just try to sit through *Convoi de femmes*, *La Maison des filles perdues* or *Orloff and the Invisible Man* without the aid of a fast forward control), but they're interesting to watch as 'control experiments' against which Franco's superficially similar work of the same period can be gauged ... Incredibly, judging by the giant movie poster in the scene where Tanner confronts the Radecks in Berlin, *Doctor Zhivago* is still playing at the same cinema three years after *Succubus*! ... The huge medieval iron neck-pincers seen in *Eugenie... the Story of her Journey into Perversion* make a return appearance during the scene with Alice Arno; they'll be back again in Franco's infamous 'video-nasty' *Bloody Moon* (1980).

**Other versions:** The anamorphic DVD release of *Eugenie* from Blue Underground bears the onscreen title *Eugenia*, a 1984 copyright date, and frequently – though not always – dubs Soledad Miranda as 'Eugenia' rather than Eugenie. It would seem that Eurociné wanted to re-release the film and re-establish their copyright. (Franco took the opportunity to sort out a glitch on the music track, at the point where Lesoeur whispers in Tanner's ear). All other versions have the title *Eugenie*. Blue Underground marketed the film under the cover title *Eugenie de Sade* (a title drawn from a Belgian film poster which, to my knowledge, never appeared as a theatrical screen title).

The Blue Underground DVD of *Eugenie* could almost be considered the definitive version, were it not for a couple of very curious details which emerge from an English-language trailer included among the extras. The trailer bears the title *Eugenia* (but with the old *Eugenie* font, nitpickers!) and borrows a musical theme from *Eugenie... the Story of her Journey into Perversion*, but what's really interesting is the presence of shots from two scenes not included in any currently available version of the film. In the first of these, we see Eugenie undressing and kneeling before an unknown older woman. The scene takes place in Eugenie's bedroom: note the teddybear and clock on the bedside table. In the other, we see Müller throttling a woman on the bed in Eugenie's bedroom (the same woman? I think so – both are wearing blue panties), then rising to his feet and staring into the camera. At no point in any currently available version of the film does this older victim appear. Note too that the arrangement of books on the bedside table is identical to the scene in which we see Eugenie writhing on her bed in front of her father. This would suggest that the missing scenes were filmed contemporaneously, maybe even on the same day (if not, you would expect the pile of books to have been tidied away, or at least rearranged). It would seem that at some point in its history the film included another seduction and murder! It's possible, of course, that the material was shot but never used; it's also possible that a longer cut of this essential film once played in the sex cinemas of Europe, one that currently eludes us on DVD and Blu-ray...



**Above:**

These frames, taken from the Eurociné trailer for *Eugenie* (bearing the screen title *Eugenia*), depict two scenes not currently available in any release version on video, DVD or Blu-ray. They show an older dark-haired woman with a full figure being pleased by Eugenie, before being strangled to death with a curtain cord by Radeck. From the positions of the characters, and way that Radeck looks directly to camera after strangling the victim, we can surmise that the scene plays out very much like the one that opens the film (see larger picture, left). In other words, either Radeck or Eugenie holds a 16mm movie camera and films the action, while the other has sex with the unsuspecting female. At a certain point Radeck passes the camera to Eugenie, moves into shot, and commences strangling the victim.

The presence of another shot, in the same room, of Eugenie and her father naked in the midst of a torrid embrace, suggests that the murder scene was followed by this display of incestuous arousal, brought on - in true Sadean fashion - by the murder the two have just committed.

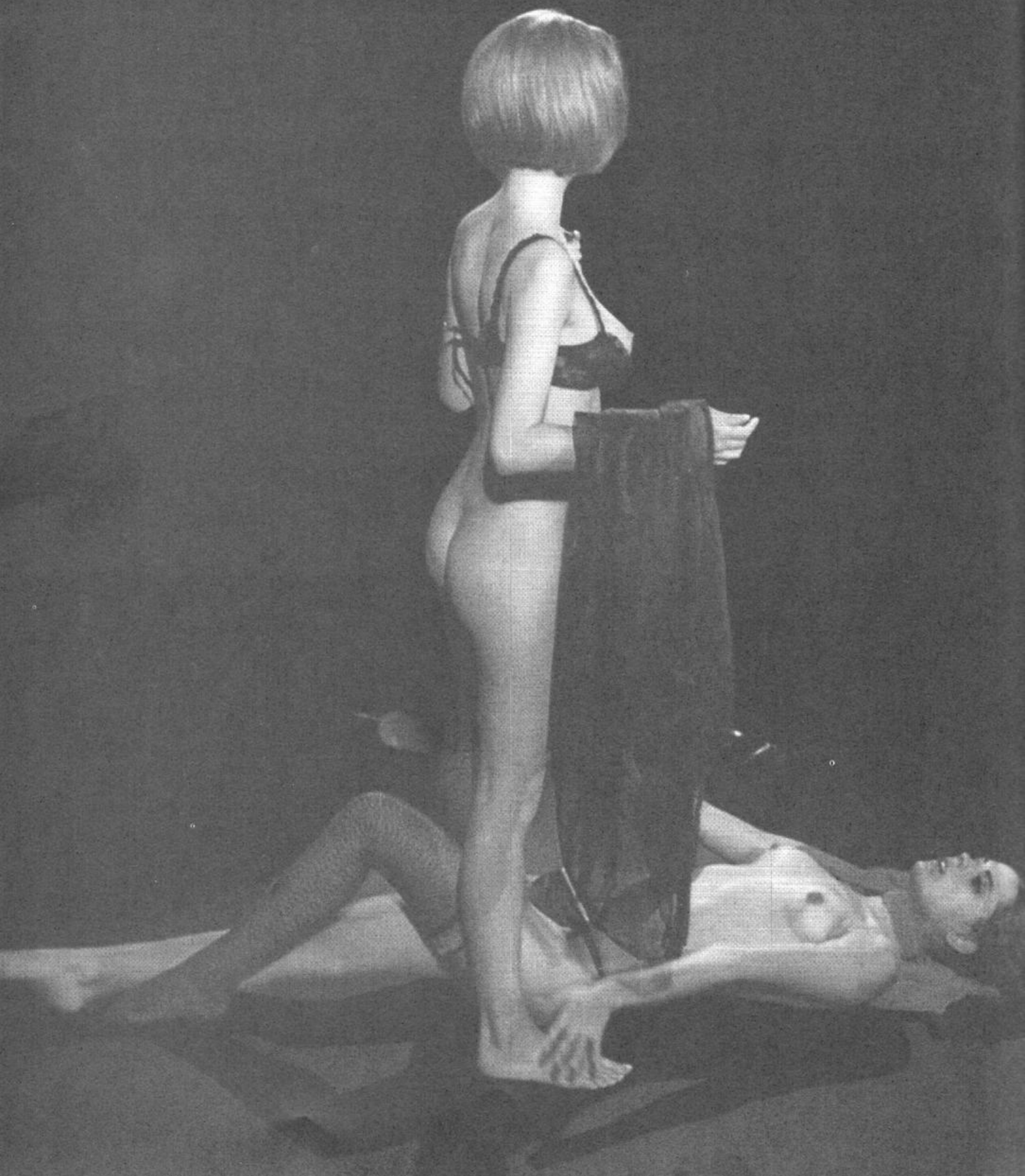
Why is the scene missing? It is noticeably out of focus much of the time, so perhaps Eurociné protested against its inclusion on that basis? It seems unlikely, given the free and easy attitude to such matters displayed elsewhere in their output! It's also possible that the negative was damaged in a way that made the scene impossible to cut together, in which case these few shots may be among the only ones not affected. We may never know, but the truth is out there - somewhere...

**Below:**

The three protagonists: Eugenie, the willing pupil of her father's theories; Radeck, the Sadean instigator, seen here taking fashion photographs of a model destined to become the couple's next victim; and Attila Tanner, the critic-voyeur who is strangely reticent to inform the authorities, seen here quizzing the Radecks about their amoral lifestyle choices and their predilection for crime.







# VAMPYROS LESBOS

## Spain & West Germany 1970

Spanish depósito legal number: M-2.482-1974

*Original theatrical title in country of origin*

**Las vampiras** (SP) *The Female Vampires*

**Vampiros Lesbos Erbin des Dracula** (GER) *...Heiress of Dracula*

*Alternative titles*

**Vampiros lesbos** (FR theatrical)

**Vampiros Lesbos Erbin des Dracula** (GER poster)

**El signo del vampiro** (SP shooting title) *The Sign of the Vampire*

**Im Zeichen der Vampire** (GER shooting title) *The Sign of the Vampire*

**Das Mal des Vampirs** (GER shooting title) *The Mark of the Vampire*

**Schlechte Zeiten für Vampire** (GER shooting title) *Bad Times for Vampires*

**Sexualité spécial** (FR alt. theatrical) *Bizarre Sexuality*

*Production companies*

**Fénix Film** (Madrid)

**CCC Filmkunst** (Berlin)

**Tele-Cine Film-und Fernsehproduktion** (Berlin)

© 1970 **Tele-Cine** [German prints]

*Theatrical distributors*

**Exclusivas Floralva Distribución S.A.** (Barcelona)

**Cinerama Filmgesellschaft mbH** (Munich)

*Timeline*

Shooting date	27 April - 4 June	1970
Classified (GER)	11 May	1971
Germany	15 July	1971
French visa 39921 issued	02 January	1973
France	26 September	1973
Barcelona	28 January	1974
Madrid	27 May	1974
Seville	26 July	1974

*Theatrical running time*

Germany	89m
Spain	91m

**Cast:** **Soledad Miranda** (Countess Nadine Carody). **Ewa Strömberg** (Linda Westinghouse). **Dennis Price** (Dr. Eldon Seward). **Heidrun Kussin** (Agra, Dr. Seward's patient). **José Martínez Blanco** (Melnick, Seward's assistant). **Andrés Monales** (Omar, Linda's boyfriend). **Paul Müller** (Dr. Steiner, Linda's psychiatrist). **Michael Berling** (Morpho, the Countess' manservant). **Jess Franco** (Mehmet, hotel porter). *uncredited:* **Beni Cardoso** (victim in wine cellar).

*note: some Spanish video sleeves (e.g. Divisa) insist on referring to Soledad Miranda's character as 'Nadia Orloff'!*

*Credits:* director: **Jess Franco**. story & screenplay: **Jess Franco** & **Jaime Chavarri** [SP prints]. written by **Jess Franco** [GER prints]. director of photography: **Manuel Merino**. editor: **María Luisa Soriano** [SP prints] / **Clarissa Ambach** [GER prints]. music: **Manfred Hübler**, **David Kunne** [SP prints] / **Manfred Hübler**, **Siegfried Schwab** [GER prints]. produced by **Arturo Marcos Tejedor** [SP prints] / **Karl-Heinz Mannchen** [GER prints]. production manager: **Karl-Heinz Mannchen** [SP prints]. assistant producer: **Luis F. Rodríguez**. assistant director: **Rudolph Hertzog, Jr.**. continuity: **Ana María Settimó de Esteva**. camera operator: **Javier Pérez Zofio**. camera assistant: **Alberto Prous**. still photography: **Ramón Ardid**. set dresser: **Karl Meyerberg**. make-up: **Paloma Fernández**. assistant editor: **Domingo García**. colour by **Eastmancolor**. laboratory: **Fotofilm, S.A.**. post-synchronization: **Arcofón, S.A.** [SP prints]. music publisher: **Audio Tonstudio** (Berlin). *uncredited:* executive producer: **Artur Brauner**. continuity: **Nicole Guettard**.

**Synopsis:** *After a night out with her boyfriend Omar, watching a nightclub burlesque show involving a beautiful predatory woman ravishing a human 'dummy', Linda becomes preoccupied with what she has seen and consults Dr. Steiner, a psychiatrist. She tells him that she had dreamed about the woman before seeing her in the flesh. Soon afterwards Linda's employer asks her to help in establishing a real estate office in Istanbul. She agrees, saying that she's already going to Turkey to see the Countess Nadine Carody, whom she has never met, regarding an inheritance. In a small Turkish town en route to the Kadidados Islands, where the Countess lives, Linda encounters Mehmet, a sinister hotel employee who warns her not to go to the island. Despite walking in on him torturing a woman in the hotel cellar, Linda ignores his warnings and continues on her journey. Arriving at the Countess's beach-house she finds it empty. The Countess is outside, sunbathing by her swimming pool. She greets Linda, who is startled by her appearance: she is the woman from the nightclub show. After swimming and sunbathing together, Nadine and Linda discuss the terms of the inheritance, which involves the transfer of property from a certain Count Dracula. Linda falls unconscious after drinking red wine and the Countess sucks her blood. Arising some time later, feeling groggy and confused, Linda staggers outside, but she faints again when she sees the Countess in the swimming pool, apparently dead ... At a private clinic in Istanbul run by Dr. Seward, a psychiatrist fascinated by the occult, a woman called Agra raves that her friend 'The Queen of the Night' is returning. Linda is brought to Seward's clinic having lost her memory. Her boyfriend Omar finds her there, but she cannot remember anything that took place on the island. Soon Omar too is bitten by the vampire. Meanwhile, Countess Carody has become obsessed with Linda, seeking her out again to pass on "the secrets of the vampires", as Count Dracula did to her many years ago...*

"Sometimes after an hour of apathy, my strange and beautiful companion would take my hand and hold it with a fond pressure, renewed again and again; blushing softly, gazing in my face with languid and burning eyes, and breathing so fast that her dress rose and fell with the tumultuous respiration. It was like the ardor of a lover; it embarrassed me; it was hateful and yet over-powering; and with gloating eyes she drew me to her, and her hot lips traveled along my cheek in kisses; and she would whisper, almost in sobs, 'You are mine, you shall be mine, you and I are one for ever.' Then she had thrown herself back in her chair, with her small hands over her eyes, leaving me trembling."

from *Carmilla* by Joseph Sheridan le Fanu

'Reclining at her feet, elated yet calm,  
Delphine stared up at her with shining eyes  
the way a lioness watches her prey once her fangs  
marked it for her own'

from *Femmes Damnées: Delphine et Hippolyte* (1857) by  
Charles Baudelaire

"I find myself in strange situations and do inexplicable things. It's like a call from nowhere."

Linda Westinghouse, *Vampyros Lesbos*.

**Production notes:** Franco's next cluster of films were bankrolled by another major player in commercial European cinema, Artur Brauner, whose Berlin-based CCC (Central Cinema Company) had been in operation since the Second World War. Brauner was born in 1918 in Lodz, Poland. During the German invasion of Poland he escaped with his family to the Soviet Union, staying there until the end of the war, upon which he moved to Berlin. A film buff since childhood, he applied for a film company license in September 1946 and founded CCC. In 1949 he acquired a former manufacturing plant in Spandau-Haselhorst, Berlin and established his first studios. Through the 1950s and 1960s the CCC studios were amongst the busiest in Europe, and Brauner himself is credited with having produced over 200 features, achieving sustained commercial success with a series of sequels to Fritz Lang's *Dr. Mabuse* films and a steady stream of 'krimis' (West German proto-giallo thrillers) based on the crime novels of Bryan Edgar Wallace. Franco was introduced to Brauner by Karl Heinz Männchen, and swiftly found himself hard at work on a slate of new releases. In many cases Spanish co-financing was provided thanks to Cooperativa Fénix Films, a Madrid-based company operated by Arturo Marcos who would go on to support Franco in several other co-productions during the Seventies. Between them, Brauner, Männchen and Marcos would co-produce nine Franco films, beginning with *Vampyros Lesbos*.

**Review:** *Vampyros Lesbos* is essential Jess Franco, a filmic 'happening' that radically reupholsters the vampire mythos - changing the furniture, the mood and the narrative style - while

relinquishing literary affectations for a sleek, airy minimalism. The result is somewhere between a sun-drenched erotic daydream and a humid sexual nightmare, summoned to the screen with a bold experimentalism that privileges inscrutable visuals over storytelling. Central to the film's fascination is stunning lead actress Soledad Miranda, playing a seductive vampire whose taste for Mediterranean beaches and chic interior design shakes the tired cobwebs from the conventional Gothic and ushers in a new era.

We begin with a terrific frisson of strangeness. A distorted voice intones backwards syllables over cool organ music; onscreen we see a ship anchored off the coast at dawn. The collision of elements suggests sailors on faraway shores receiving radio signals in an unknown language, and while the ship is of no importance to the narrative its talismanic appearance encourages a mode of poetic association that will persist throughout the film. We cut to an equally mysterious scene: a darkened room containing nothing but a large ornate mirror, a plastic mannequin, and a raven-haired young woman in a negligée, carrying a candelabra. Theatrical lighting tips us off that this is some kind of performance. As the scene unfolds, we see the mannequin reflected in the mirror - but wait! It's now a beautiful naked woman holding the same pose. The raven haired woman interacts with the 'dummy' and it 'comes to life'. The two of them sink to the floor in a lovers' embrace and the performance ends...

The star of the show is Soledad Miranda in her most iconic and liberating role. Already an outstanding addition to Franco's cinema on the basis of her central performance in *Eugenie*, she once again brings to the screen a unique aura of preternatural stillness and haunted sexuality. *Vampyros Lesbos* is memorable for many reasons, but it's Miranda who provides the focus. Her eyes (so much older than her smooth, haughty face) promise dangers that the tacky label 'scream queen' can't contain: a perfect combination of seductive nymph and evil spirit. One is irresistibly reminded of the female vampire described in Joseph Sheridan le Fanu's *Carmilla*: "She was slender, and wonderfully graceful. Except that her movements were languid - very languid [...] Her complexion was rich and brilliant; her features were small and beautifully formed; her eyes large, dark, and lustrous; her hair was quite wonderful [...] There was a coldness, it seemed to me, beyond her years, in her smiling melancholy persistent refusal to afford me the least ray of light."<sup>1</sup> Franco's film is not an adaptation of Le Fanu's famous novella, but there is much to be gained from the comparison, as we shall see...

'Nadine' may seem a prosaic moniker for this extraordinary femme-fatale, but then Franco often uses names that collide the mundane with the mysterious. Having Dracula's heiress work as a stripper, performing an arty burlesque act in an Istanbul nightclub, also rings the changes. We are certainly far from the Carpathians, and the stuffy dignity of 'old money'! To cap it all, Nadine is a thoroughly self-aware, performative vampire. The choreography of her strip show mimics the hypnotic seduction of her victims, with a nameless female partner posed like a yielding automaton



to be positioned as Nadine decrees. It's a pleasing irony that this vampiress should perform an act that reveals her predatory nature – hidden in plain sight like Poe's purloined letter – to an audience who treat it as mere sexy symbolism. Nadine's nightclub act serves to imply that symbols are masks hiding dangerous forces from our gaze, which creates unease as a preponderance of symbolic imagery then follows.

This brings us to one of the most striking aspects of *Vampyros Lesbos*: its mosaic of allusive cutaway shots. In fact they're given so much screen time that to call them cutaways is to diminish them; they are intrinsic to the film's effect. There are four repeating images in all: a scorpion scuttling across a stone patio; a fisherman's net suspended on a post, against which a white butterfly flutters; droplets of blood streaming down a polished window; and a red octagonal kite flying in a clear blue sky. They first occur together during a dream Linda experiences after watching Nadine's nightclub act, and they return when she arrives at the Countess's seafront apartment. We see them next when Linda has been drugged and ravished, and again at the end when Linda kills the Countess. The scorpion is the most straightforward symbol: we see it drowning in the bottom of the Countess's swimming pool at the climax when Nadine dies; the two deaths are linked, suggesting the scorpion as symbolic of the vampire. Why does Franco choose to link them in this way? Does the symbol illuminate the character of Nadine? Not really, but it's an image of a deadly lifeform, quite alien to us, and terrifying in appearance; it evokes a visceral fear of poisonous attack. The butterfly on the net suggests the age-old adversarial relationship; in this case, the butterfly throws itself against the mesh, rather than being chased and caught. We can say that this represents Linda's susceptibility to Nadine's lesbianism, a net that need not even be thrown as the 'quarry' is busily enmeshing herself. The shots of blood sliding down glass are pure abstraction, an image of the life-force suspended as if in mid-air, with no body from which it has emerged, and no vampire to consume it; the essence of life sliding down a transparent glass surface that one could easily say represents the screen and thus the whole scopophilic urge of the cinema. As for the red kite; kites are sometimes associated with spirit or soul, and given that it falls to the ground in the last shot of the film it can be seen as a representation of Nadine's spirit, stilled at last after hundreds of years.

However, one has to ask if it's an entirely satisfying process to 'explain' these images, to tie them to signification. While they can be said to operate as I've suggested, their real value is the way they disrupt the flow of the story and rewire the audience's connection to the film. *Vampyros Lesbos* hovers between abstraction and narrative storytelling; the images I've described may indeed be accessible to interpretation(s) but they are also designed to change our structural impression of the film, emphasising visual stimulation over verbal information, stasis over action, repetition over progression. They are atemporal, thus feeding a sensation of time slowing or ceasing (a key artistic project that Franco would return to again and again

over the following fifteen years). The visual field is atemporal inasmuch as the information in a shot arrives simultaneously to our retina, whereas a verbal statement has a beginning, a middle and an end; the editing of these 'symbolic' shots is atemporal because it arbitrarily interrupts sequentiality with raw juxtaposition. And while repetition is a form of change (to quote Brian Eno) it also serves, in Franco, to suggest déjà-vu, cyclical time, and entrapment. This preponderance of non-narrative imagery serves to draw the film nearer and nearer to a state of stillness and suspension, the condition of which evidently appeals to Franco on an artistic and erotic level, and also fits the bill when we consider the mesmeric influence of the vampire; indeed Franco's filmmaking, one could say, is vampiric in its desire to mesmerise, to bring the viewer to a dazed state of suspension, to overwrite the genre's demands for action with the lure of quietude and stillness.

As befits a film with such a dizzyingly Sapphic title, men are largely sidelined, a trend that would flourish in Franco's cinema in years to come. Linda's good-looking but frightfully dull boyfriend Omar hangs around the edges of the story looking for a way to help without ever really understanding what's going on, even after Nadine bites him. "He's lost a lot of blood, but it's not serious," says Dr. Seward, a poker-faced comic statement that seems to echo Franco's lack of interest in the character. Unlike Vicente Aranda's diverting but conservative lesbian vampire story *The Blood Spattered Bride* (Spain, 1972), the men of *Vampyros Lesbos* do not dash imperiously to the rescue, nor does the male fear of being made redundant by lesbian desire receive the consolation prize of steering the narrative. Franco is unthreatened by lesbianism – fascinated and aroused, yes, but challenged, no. On the contrary, as a committed voyeur, he relishes it. One never senses the macho Spanish male's resentment of female independence lurking behind Franco's camera. The lesbianism played out in *Vampyros Lesbos* is the whole story – the only flaw is that the film ends with Linda slaying Nadine and puttering off to sea with her doopy boyfriend, a conservative conclusion that feels like Franco's only error of judgement.

It's an error of judgement, however, that requires us to delve into a can of worms. With a film title so perfectly poised to rouse the interest of a predominantly male audience, one has to ask what is it about 'lesbian vampires' that makes them so alluring for commercial genre cinema (and here I include the relatively avant-garde *Vampyros Lesbos*, which, despite its oddity, was brokered first and foremost as a commercial movie). The words 'lesbian' and 'vampire' go together like bacon and eggs in contemporary horror cinema, so it's worth shaking the familiarity off the concept and looking at it again, because the persistent combination of lesbianism and vampirism in the genre speaks volumes about attitudes to homosexuality in all its forms. That it should be female homosexuality rather than the male variety that ends up being explored in a commercial context should come as no surprise; I think we can all figure out the cluster of factors that make this so. We can also, I think, dispense with any notion that the demographic

targets of the subgenre are lesbians. The notion is laughable when you see it written down; the idea of a film company financing a movie like this (or *The Vampire Lovers*, or *Daughters of Darkness*, or *Lesbian Vampire Killers*) to appeal to gay woman is absurd. The intended recipients are male heterosexuals who – let's not mince words – like to see beautiful women biting each others' tits. The point of view of lesbians themselves is commercially unimportant. So far so obvious. But does it matter if lesbians are irrelevant to the creators and primary consumers of a film called *Vampyros Lesbos*? One can imagine a certain type of viewer saying, "Well it's not for them, is it?"

I'm certainly not the first to drag this one out of the horror genre's closet<sup>2</sup>, but it's striking, and to say the least unflattering, that the power of same sex attraction should be so commonly twinned with vampirism. The following quote from Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, the subgenre's founding text, underlines the problem. It comes after the bloodsucking has begun, and describes how the vampire reacts to the heroine's increasing weakness in the daytime: "*Carmilla became more devoted to me than ever, and her strange paroxysms of languid adoration more frequent. She used to gloat on me with increasing ardor the more my strength and spirits waned.*"<sup>3</sup> Heterosexuality is thus aligned with innate vitality and health; homosexuality with a form of energy-theft. Capitulation to same-sex temptation leads to lassitude and sickness, and the homosexual predator thrives, indeed 'gloats', the more weak and enfeebled a heterosexual becomes.

In Le Fanu's time, the spiritual aspect of all this was unambiguous; Carmilla reacts violently to the sound of church bells and hymns, so we're in no doubt that her passion for the heroine is unholy. The story is a Christian fable about the danger of a particular sin, one so hideous that only through metaphor does the author dare describe it. In a more secular age, and in films such as *Vampyros Lesbos*, for which Christian intent cannot be directly attributed, we have to ask what it is that motivates the continued symbolic association of same-sex attraction and vampirism. The ebbs and flows of Christian influence on morality aside, we're left to conclude that whilst homophobia is tucked deeply inside the lesbian vampire package, the labels have, as it were, fallen off. In terms of mass-market consumption, the fears that first brought same-sex attraction and vampirism together may persist somewhere within, but they no longer drive their continuing repetition; for a young male audience lesbians are 'hot', vampires are 'scary', women are hot and scary, so lesbian vampires push all the buttons, with the added attraction of removing male bodies from the ensuing softcore sex scenes. It doesn't matter that the female being seduced by the vampire is experiencing 'the terror of homosexual seduction'; in the end all that matters is that both seducer and seducee get their kit off.

One is tempted to say, as many do, that the vampire has become the hero(ine) of films like this. And yet, even if the lesbian vampire is portrayed as attractive and exciting the underlying message is consistent: their beauty, their allure, serves an evil intent. No

matter how sympathetically portrayed, vampires are shown to be dangerous, murderous. Worse still, they proselytise: they want you to become 'one of them'. No matter how much twisting of the concept one does to alleviate this, the truth remains that vampirism carries a negative association; calling vampires 'heroes' or 'heroines' is a cheat. The (continued) use of the vampire myth to tell stories about same sex attraction always returns us to the realisation that this is how a persistent mindset views homosexual desire: something wicked, parasitical, and inclined to infect others. Oh, and being a vampire *still* means you can't go to Heaven; even in the lovey-dovey *Twilight* films.

Franco's take on all this is to foreground both women and de-emphasise heterosexuality and masculinity, something which he does literally (within the story) and symbolically (in the mise-en-scène and the sound/picture editing). In a story like Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, the heroine-victim is also the narrator, which positions her centrally as the voice of reason and morality; she reports to us her account of a predatory female vampire. In Franco's uncut version of *Vampyros Lesbos* (the German *Vampyros Lesbos - Erbin des Dracula*) there is no narrator, therefore Linda's position is far more precarious. In fact the first face we see is Nadine's, looking straight down the camera as she performs her mesmeric nightclub act. At the start, Linda is just an onlooker, a face in the audience. There is no narrator, no central position from which 'normality' is dispensed. By contrast, the censored Spanish variant of the film, *Las vampiras*, has two voice-overs: the first one male, over the credit sequence, setting the scene and explaining the myth surrounding Countess Carody; the second one Linda's, running over several minutes of near-abstract imagery until a shot of her therapist roots the voice-over (and the montage of images) in the rational world of psychiatric consultation. *Las vampiras* prioritises the masculine realm of language, rationality and explanation, and places the voice of the heterosexual heroine in a (delegated) position of authority over the quasi-abstract imagery remarked upon earlier. In *Las vampiras* the *logos* of psychiatry and the authority of the omniscient male narrator are imposed upon the *eros* of the film's (feminine) discourse. The Spanish and German versions are really quite different films at this level.

*Vampyros Lesbos* is an extraordinary experience, and one of his most essential films. It offers the viewer a slender peninsula of narrative, with the seas of high strangeness lapping all around. It tells of a woman seduced into a world of darkness and mystery, except there's almost no *literal* darkness to be seen. The shadows are internal, driven into hiding by the relentlessly sunny locations. It's a perversely beautiful film whose clean, modern lines, bright colours and open vistas are about as far away as possible from gloomy cemeteries and dank Transylvanian mists. Merino's ultra-sharp photography is perfectly suited to the material, and the restless hand-held compositions set the seal on the Franco house style for years to come. Borderless, near-plotless, panoramically bizarre, *Vampyros Lesbos* carries just enough of the conventional





*This page:*

*Candid shots, taken (probably) by Ramón Ardid during the shooting of Vampyros Lesbos, showing the cast and crew relaxing on location.*

*Clockwise from top right:*

*Jess Franco with Soledad Miranda at the location for Countess Carody's seafront home.*

*Franco lines up a shot at the location used for Seward's clinic, with continuity person Ana María Settimó de Esteve and an unknown male.*

*Franco prepares to shoot the Countess's demise, with Michael Berling (standing) and unknown crew members.*

*Mealtime for the cast and crew; l to r: Dennis Price, director of photography Manuel Merino, Michael Berling, Ewa Strömberg, Soledad Miranda.*

*Franco discusses a scene with Soledad Miranda.*

*Franco discusses continuity with Ana María Settimó de Esteve.*

*A quick chat over the details of a scene: Franco (standing) with (l to r, seated) José Martínez Blanco, Manuel Merino, Dennis Price, Ana María Settimó de Esteve.*

*Jess in high spirits, with Soledad Miranda.*

*Facing page:*

*Contact sheet for the filming of Soledad Miranda's sexy nightclub routine in Vampyros Lesbos. All shots show her with the dummy, not the woman who plays the dummy coming to life, whose identity therefore remains in doubt.*

*All pictures this page from the collection of Uwe Huber.*

*All pictures facing page from the collection of Guiskard Oberparleiter.*

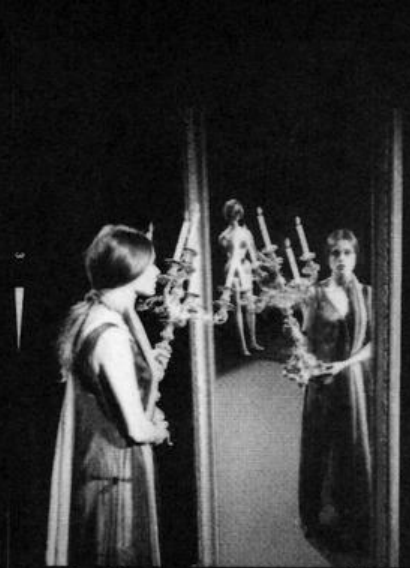




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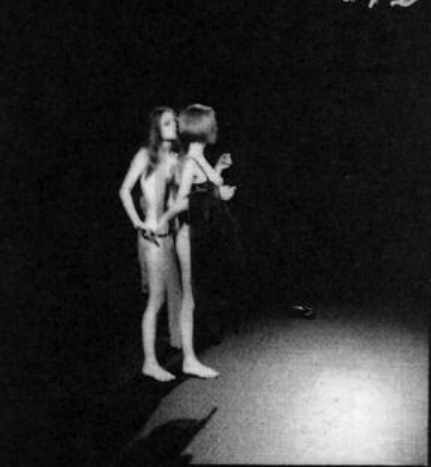


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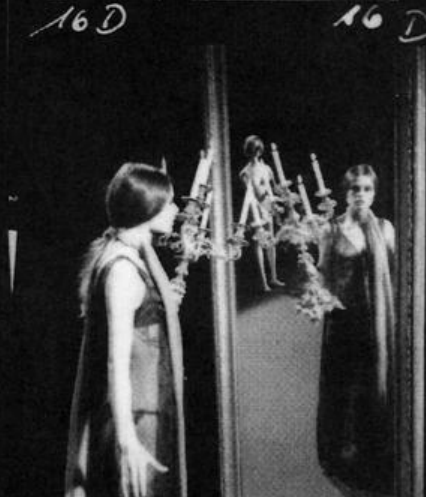


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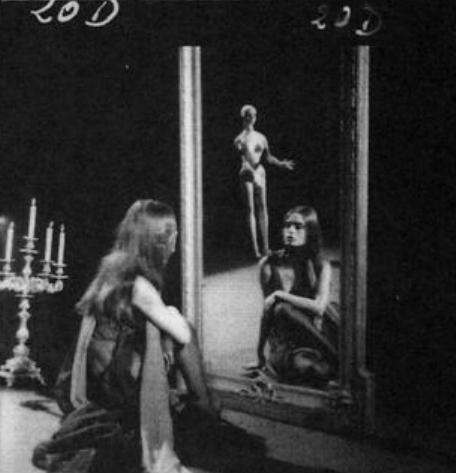


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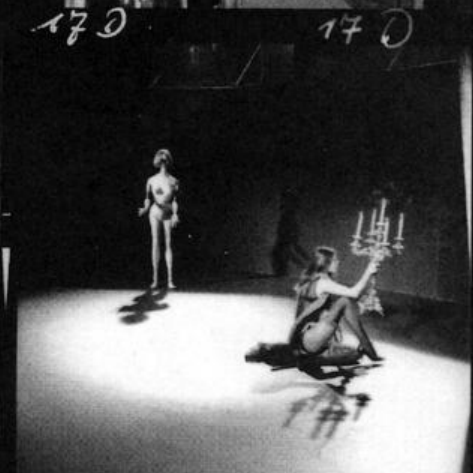
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21D







narrative of Franco's 1960s work to leave it at a crossroads, facing an avant-garde future ("It's like a call from nowhere") while still holding hands with the past.

**Franco on screen:** Franco's role as the depraved hotelier, Memmet, is so pungent and grotesque it almost overbalances the film. Driven insane by his wife's madness, he tortures women in his cellar, rearranging their collapsing psyches for his own amusement. In a pantingly horrible monologue he describes how the torture drives his victims to declare their 'love' as they perish. The film captures a shiver of the truly horrible as he sneers, "*In agony they all love me*". It's this cynicism which makes us withhold our sympathy – he's the sort of serial killer whose heart bleeds for his own woes, who claims to be driven by forces he can't control yet remains totally aware of the game he's playing. After hearing his self-serving argument that he's somehow extracting love from his victims along with teeth and sundry body parts, we can only sigh with relief as Linda brings that most cumbersome of murder weapons, a bow saw, down on his neck ... Bearing in mind how busy Franco must have been, as both actor and director on this film, it's interesting to see the doodles that Paul Müller, playing a psychiatrist, draws on his notepad as Linda describes her dreams. Amid numerous stick figures there is one holding a movie camera, while another stands behind him gesticulating. Unlike the other stick figures, the gesticulating man is drawn with six arms! Surely this is Müller's pen-portrait of Franco directing cameraman Manuel Merino, with the six arms demonstrating his tendency to do almost everything himself!

**Cast and crew:** Ewa Strömberg as Linda is for me the film's weakest link. Cast at the request of the West German co-producers (she'd already racked up several credits in Edgar Wallace adaptations, including Albert Vohrer's *The College Girl Murders* and *The Man with the Glass Eye*) she's okay at representing the character's fear and anxiety but less so with the elements of seduction and arousal. There's something a little bit 'mumsy' about her that leaves you puzzled as to why Nadine is so erotically fascinated. Still, what do I know? I'm not a lesbian vampire... Andrés Monales (aka 'Andre Montchall' aka 'Viktor Feldman') plays Omar, Linda's ineffectual boyfriend, a thankless role only memorable because of the actor's good looks. Franco cast him six times in just over two years (beginning with his brief appearance alongside Soledad Miranda in *Nightmares Come at Night* and ending with a second-string romantic role in *The Demons*). He appears never to have worked with anyone else, and has since disappeared from the industry: one likes to imagine him as a giallo-movie character come to life, a passing playboy perhaps, dabbling in movies for a couple of years while waiting for his rich parents to die, before jetting off to spend the family fortune in the casinos of Southern Europe...

**Music:** The eccentric psychedelic score to *Vampyros Lesbos* by Manfred Hübler and Siegfried Schwab became a surprise hit on CD during the 'lounge music' revival of the mid 1990s. Trendy young things bopped ironically around their bachelor pads to it, and

the party-friendliness of many of the numbers brought attention to Franco from new and unexpected directions. Unfortunately, as erotic horror film music it's only half-suited to purpose, often puncturing the mood with camp horns and kitsch sitars (the latter instrument adding a stolen Rolling Stones riff to augment that groovy late-1960s ambience). The slower, more sensual pieces work best, especially a swirling Hammond organ track called 'The Message' which suits Franco's lush, opiated sensuality perfectly.

**Studios:** Filmed at CCC Berlin-Spandau.

**Locations:** Istanbul, Barcelona and Alicante (Spain). The stairwell where Seward faces off against the Countess is the same one seen in *Eugenie*, where it's part of the Radeck house. Also linking the films is the bedroom in which the Countess seduces the drugged Linda; it's the bedroom in *Eugenie* where the 'snuff film' is shot. What's especially interesting is the way that even in a relatively confined space, Franco diligently ensures that the camera angles reveal different views of the room in the two different films; this is often true when he shoots material for more than one film in the same location, a commitment to variety beyond the call of duty that belies the frequent accusation of laziness levelled at him by some critics.

**Connections:** It is often said that *Vampyros Lesbos* was based on Bram Stoker's short story 'Dracula's Guest'<sup>4</sup>; however there is almost nothing to connect the two, except that both share the influence of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, from which came the first literary lesbian vampire. There is another indirect relationship to Stoker: *Vampyros Lesbos* can be seen as an auto-critique of Franco's troubled *Count Dracula*, responding to the failings of that film by inverting its tropes. Instead of sepulchral darkness, bright summer sunshine; instead of landlocked mountain castles, modern apartments by the seashore; instead of a fusty old aristocrat, a beautiful young woman. Water is usually an enemy of the vampire; here the Countess lives by the sea and swims naked in her private pool. In place of the scene in *Dracula* when Harker finds the Count in his coffin, Linda finds Nadine floating face-upwards 'asleep' in her swimming pool. Garlic, horse-drawn carriages, stakes through the heart, all are dismissed without a glance. Only a slender thread connects *Vampyros Lesbos* with the *Dracula* story; the fact that Linda (in the style of Jonathan Harker) is sent by her employers, a real estate company, to visit the Countess and discuss her investments. One can't help but smile, however, when Linda first meets the vampire; no sepulchral welcome in fusty castle doorways here. The meeting takes place on a beachfront verandah, unpopulated except for the two women and the hovering presence of a servant. "You must be tired," purrs the Countess from behind enormous sunglasses. "Would you like a swim before we get down to business?" With this, Linda and Nadine run onto the beach for a nude dip in the Mediterranean; hardly the sort of encounter one can picture between, say, Christopher Lee and John Van Eyssen in Hammer's *Dracula* (1958), or Bela Lugosi and David Manners in Tod Browning's 1931 original!

Le Fanu's *Carmilla* was filmed by Roger Vadim in 1960 as *Blood and Roses*, and by Roy Ward Baker in 1970 as *The Vampire Lovers*. Baker's film, made for Hammer Films, went into production at Elstree Studios in January 1970 and so precedes *Vampyros Lesbos*, even though it didn't come out until October 1970, three months after shooting wrapped on Franco's film. Not that Franco would have been ignorant of developments in England; after all, he was a close friend of Christopher Lee and Harry Alan Towers. In terms of its subject-matter, *Vampyros Lesbos* was shot with only Vadim's film preceding it, and possible rumours of a similarly themed Hammer production on the way. Consequently it strikes out very much on its own, owing none of its innovative power to other films of the day ... Count Dracula is explicitly referred to by Countess Carody, who tells Linda, "In his will, he left everything to me, to the woman who made his life worth living," thus explaining the German subtitle, *Erbin des Dracula* (Heiress of Dracula) as well as implying a sexual relationship with the old fiend himself. The Count himself is referred to as a hero, who long ago rescued Nadine when she was being raped by soldiers: "He stuck his knife into the soldier lying on top of me ... The man screamed, and I felt his blood run down my body. He was the first man in my life. It was horrible. I thought I was going to lose my mind. I noticed the Count leaning over me. He whispered, 'I will take all your suffering away.'" ... Franco loves to populate his stories with characters drawn, if only in name, from elsewhere in film and literature. Here we have Bram Stoker's Dr. Seward making his second appearance in a Franco film, this time with the face of Dennis Price. A very different figure to his namesake in Stoker, or Paul Müller's portrayal in *Count Dracula*, here he's an unscrupulous opportunist who craves knowledge of the arcane, even offering to join forces with Nadine if she'll teach him the secrets of the occult. However, this 'seeker beyond the veil' is not averse to using a Catholic banishment ritual when she rebuffs his plea! (Franco's residual Catholic upbringing can be discerned here; Seward's Biblical Latin makes the Countess flinch and hide her face.) Also drawn from the 'parent text' of Stoker's *Dracula* is an obvious Renfield surrogate called Agra, a woman locked in an asylum who can sense the proximity of her undead Mistress, like a junkie prisoner sniffing a hot spoon of heroin in the next cell ... Nadine, meanwhile, is accompanied by a trendy-looking male sidekick who answers to the name of Morpho – a name drawn from Franco's horror debut *The Awful Dr. Orlof* ... The resumption of Nadine's floorshow roughly an hour into the film sees symbolism turn to reality, as Nadine's co-performer is bitten for real (although the audience clap and cheer regardless). The sexy floorshow that turns to real murder is a structural trope from *Succubus* that would also find its way into *Exorcism* (1974) ... Soledad Miranda's sexy cabaret routine with a candelabra recalls a similar performance by Rosalba Neri in the flashback scene in *99 Women* ... Nadine's hilltop abode, with its empty rooms throbbing with menace and shut off from the world by heavy drapes, recalls *Venus in Furs*, most notably the room in which the killers are confronted by the living

corpse of their victim. As with *Venus in Furs*, the rooms uncannily foreshadow the oppressive 'Black Lodge' in David Lynch's *Twin Peaks* ... Franco would return to lesbian vampirism twice more, in *Dracula's Daughter* (1972) and *Female Vampire* (1973); in the first of these, the story elements are so fragmented that one has a hard time remembering that the titular 'daughter of Dracula' is really a bloodsucker at all, whilst in the second Franco widens the definition, creating a bisexual vampire who is the sole focus of his fascination and sympathy throughout.

**Other versions:** The Spanish theatrical cut, *Las vampiras*, has numerous differences to the German, chiefly due to censorship restrictions. It is worth seeing, however, because it has a significantly altered soundtrack, leaning far more frequently upon compositions for organ and dissonant piano, played on the insides of the instrument by Franco himself.

**Problematica:** *Obsession* adds the following unconfirmed credits: co-composer Paul Grassel; special effects Manuel Baquero.

**Press coverage:** *ABC Andalusia* were kindly disposed toward the film: "[*Las vampiras*] brings together all of the typical elements of vampire stories, a genre as old as cinema ... Again we have blood as the vivifying element, as a source of perennial youth; and as protagonist a mysterious princess who uses young victims. Spectacular gruesomeness, skillfully handled by Franco, serving generous amounts of sex, violence, sadism with an abundance of hemoglobin and anatomical displays. The cast, which includes veterans of the genre, give good performances, and all the elements contribute to the aim of providing typical entertainment to the unconditional fans of this kind of story."<sup>5</sup>

## SHE KILLED IN ECSTASY

### West Germany 1970

*Original theatrical title in country of origin*

**Sie Tötete in Ekstase** (GER) *She Killed in Ecstasy*

*Alternative titles*

**Lubriques dans l'extase** (FR theatrical) *Lewd in Ecstasy*

**Crimes dans l'extase** (BEL/French-lang poster) *Crimes in Ecstasy*

**Misdaad in extase** (BEL/Dutch-lang poster) *Crimes in Ecstasy*

**Ela Matou em Êxtase** (POR DVD cover) *She Killed in Ecstasy*

**Mrs. Hyde** (SP shooting title)

**Dr Jekyll and Miss Hyde** (alt. shooting title)

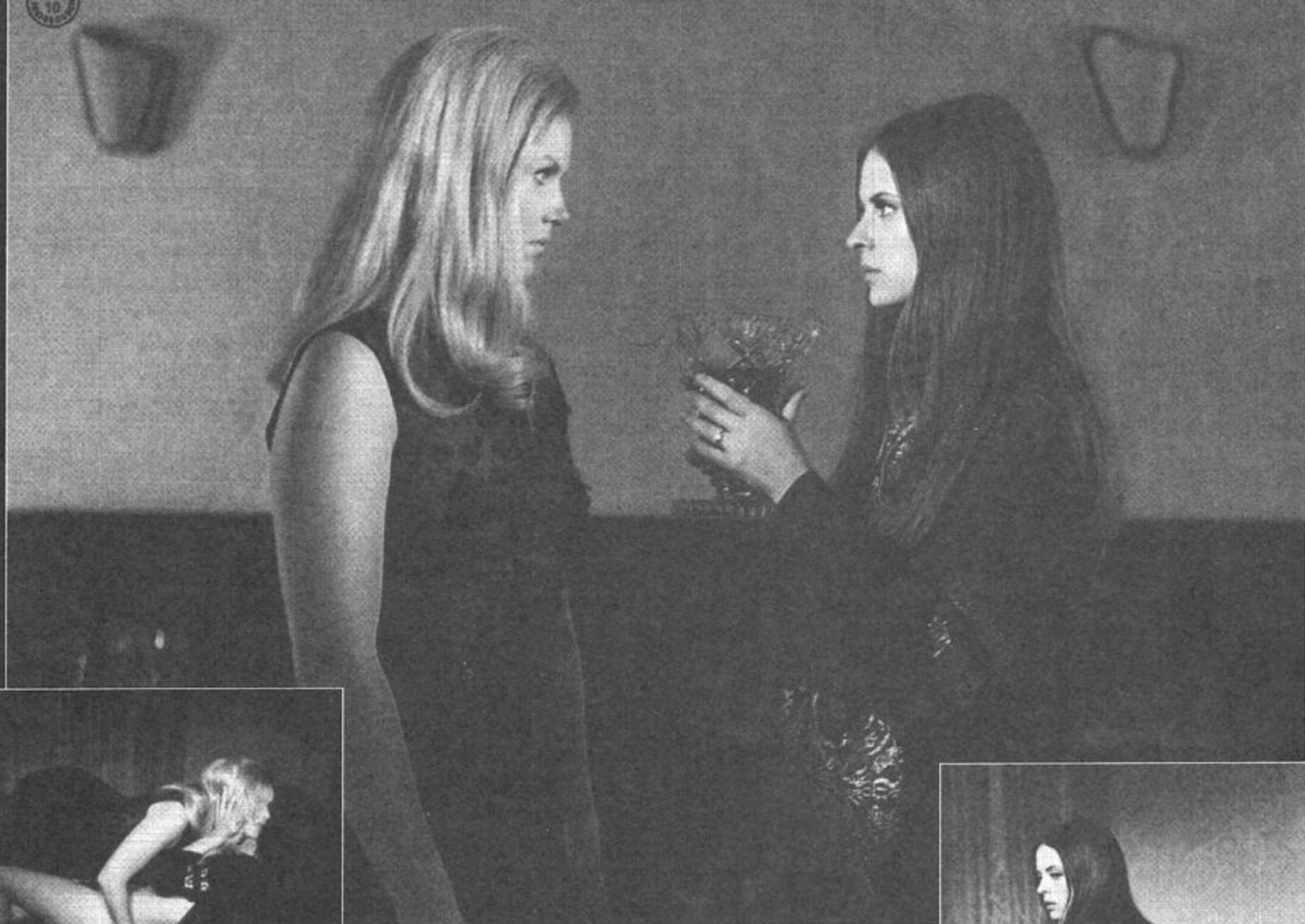
**Elle tuait dans l'extase** (FR pre-release title) *She Killed in Ecstasy*

**Dr Hokyll y Miss Hyde** (SP title offered for distribution)

*Production companies*

**Tele-Cine Film-und Fernsehproduktion** (Berlin)

© 1970 Tele-Cine [German prints]







*Theatrical distributors***Cinerama Filmgesellschaft mbH** (Munich)*Timeline*

Shooting date	27 April - 4 June	1970
Classified (GER)	16 June	1971
Germany premiere	10 December	1971
French visa 42523 issued*	08 May	1974
France*	16 October	1974

*Theatrical running time*

West Germany	77m
France*	81m

\*see 'Other versions'

**Cast:** **Soledad Miranda** [as 'Susann Korda'] (Mrs. Johnson). **Fred Williams** (Dr. Johnson). **Paul Müller** (Dr. Franklin Huston). **Howard Vernon** (Professor Jonathan Walker). **Ewa Strömberg** (Dr. Crawford). **Horst Tappert** (police inspector). *uncredited:* **Jess Franco** (Dr. Donen). **Karl-Heinz Mannchen** (Medical Council member wearing glasses).

**Credits:** director: **Jess Franco**. screenplay: **Jess Franco**. director of photography: **Manuel Merino**. editor: **Clarissa Ambach**. music: **Manfred Hübler**, **Siegfried Schwab**. additional music: **Bruno Nicolai**. executive producer: **Karl-Heinz Mannchen**. production manager: **Rudolph Hertzog, Jr.**. assistant director: **Ana María Settimó de Esteve**. *uncredited:* producer: **Artur Brauner**. colour: **Eastmancolor**.

**Synopsis:** *Dr. Johnson is excited about the benefits to humanity of his experiments with human embryos, until a medical committee of three men and one woman - Professor Walker, Dr. Crawford, Dr. Huston and Dr. Donen - rejects his work outright and orders him to discontinue, before drumming him out of the profession. Unable to cope with the rejection, Johnson loses his mind. Slashing his wrists, he takes his own life. His wife, desolate and consumed with fury at her husband's tormentors, seduces and kills the four doctors who drove her beloved to suicide, while the local police inspector conspicuously fails to solve the case...*

**Production notes:** *Sie Tötete in Ekstase* aka *She Killed in Ecstasy* was shot simultaneously with *Vampyros Lesbos*, between 27 April 27 to 4 June 1970...

**Review:** This return to the plot of *The Diabolical Dr. Z* has much to recommend it, but suffers from two significant flaws: a tonally incongruous score, and Franco's extreme circumspection when it comes to violence. The saving grace (and how!) is Soledad Miranda, whose electric performance transforms a minor work into something extraordinary.

*She Killed in Ecstasy* is an odd film, with trendy-for-the-seventies interior design and brightly coloured photography telling an essentially morbid tale of a woman so traumatised by pity for her dead husband that she keeps his corpse in the house, and mounts a campaign of murder to avenge him. Necrophilia and romantic obsession have rarely been so studiously ignored by the style of a film in which they reside. As with *Vampyros Lesbos*, the soundtrack is provided by Manfred Hübler and Siegfried Schwab, and although in the earlier film their pop-rock psychedelia often worked quite well, here it's out of place from the start, as groovy music blares away over shots of pickled babies in laboratory jars. It's rather like trying to watch a dark, morbid horror film in one room while your flatmate pumps up the surround-sound watching *Austin Powers* in the next. The anti-heroine of *Vampyros Lesbos* was a nightclub performer, which at least provided context for the music; here, in a story about the bourgeois wife of a successful surgeon who avenges his suicide by killing those who drummed him out of the profession, there's no such connection. In using such a similar score to *Vampyros Lesbos*, the film comes across like a jealous sibling dressing up in its rival's clothes. Personally, I'd consider it a favour to the film if someone re-dubbed it with Bruno Nicolai's music for *Nightmares Come at Night*.

More damagingly, there's a shortfall in Franco's approach to the exploitable aspects of the story. Although the title evokes all manner of erotic derangement, the film itself lacks murderous carnal thrills, and hides most of its horrors from the camera. For a start, surely the corpse of Doctor Johnson should worsen each time we see it? Instead it simply looks as though he's sweating. Meanwhile the murders perpetrated by Mrs. Johnson (astoundingly, we never learn her first name) are conveyed with Franco's typically dismissive attitude to gore. Characters expire from a swift slash with knife or razor, leaving a tiny smudge of red - not a gush, gout or splatter to be seen. "It was a gruesome sight... his throat was cut, and his penis was severed" says Dr. Donen about one victim. It's just as well he mentions it, as we see not so much as a bloodstain. At least Dr. Huston (Paul Müller) drools blood and spittle as he dies, but it's really not enough. One could almost mistake this circumspection for a kind of Godardian gesture, a refusal to indulge the illusion, but this is a horror film about vengeance and murder we're talking about. I'm pretty sure that if Franco had made the murders more graphic the film's reputation would be strengthened considerably.

After Dr. Johnson commits suicide (the tragedy of which Franco seems determined to sabotage with the most intrusive piece of sitar-twanging lounge pop imaginable), the film settles down to its true theme, the implacable revenge of a beautiful femme fatale. It's at this point that all reservations can be swept aside, as we concentrate on the astounding Soledad Miranda. She does more than compensate for the film's flaws; she renders them irrelevant. It's such a driven, passionate performance that you really can't take your eyes off her. Just look at her silently observing the four doctors of the Medical Assembly as they brutally reject her husband's

work; she's like a gorgon, her dark brown eyes turning to shiny black marbles of hostility. She's even more electrifying when posing as a prostitute giving sadomasochistic services to the first victim of her vengeance, the odious Doctor Walker. Playing along with Walker's 'pushy bottom' demands, we see in her eyes a fury that's feral, intense and utterly convincing.

It's typical of the sly, morally ambivalent Franco (and very much redolent of *The Diabolical Dr. Z*) that the victims are portrayed as a bunch of pompous hot-headed gasbags, who drive Johnson to suicide as much through their hectoring aggression as their rejection of his methodology. We can't really sympathise with Johnson's morally lax experiments, nor his withdrawal from his wife into his own private misery, but neither can we side with the obnoxious medical experts who hound him to his grave. The only sympathetic character in the film is Johnson's wife, who murders again and again. One has to say, though, that her choice of weapons can be a little bizarre. Her second victim, Dr. Crawford, played by Ewa Strömberg as a naive but predatory lesbian, is the recipient of one of the flat-out silliest murders ever committed to celluloid: smothered to death with a transparent plastic cushion. Mind you, I must confess I like the way it allows us to see the grotesquely distorted expression of the victim as she expires, so let's just file it under 'interesting failures' and move on.

In many of Franco's films the interior life of his characters is opaque, impossible to read, or simply absent. There can seem to be an outright disdain for psychology or 'soul' in his work, reminiscent of the Vorticist painter Wyndham Lewis, whose obsession with surface, colour and formal dynamics rejected the romantic fixation with spirit and essence. At one point Dr. Crawford and Mrs. Johnson discuss the paintings strewn around the latter's living room: examining one, Crawford says, "*I like it, but somehow it depresses me. The shapes are so hard.*" Soledad Miranda's reply could stand for many of Franco's abstract achievements in cinema: "*It's just a composition, a play of colours, nothing more. But I love it.*" Putting aside the fact that the canvasses are pretty terrible (they look like advertising artwork or bad psychedelic album covers), *She Killed in Ecstasy* is an intriguing example of Franco's emphasis on exteriority being subverted by an extraordinary performance. Take the scenes in which Mrs. Johnson has sex with the people whom she blames for her husband's suicide. Were it not for the eyes of Soledad Miranda we'd know nothing of her feelings about the vileness she performs in the name of vengeance.

Franco must have thought he had all the time in the world to explore that face, to tease out those expressions of fury and scorn, and deliver to the screen everything of which Miranda was capable. Sadly we know that wasn't the case, and what could have been just a brief early sketch in a series of ever-more complex portraits now feels like a squandered opportunity. This is a film conceived and shot in great haste: a featured cast of just six major players is padded out with secondary characters so minor you can barely catch their faces; it's as though the cameraman has been given

thirty seconds advance notice of what's to be filmed, and then left to fend for himself in a single take as characters come and go. The German dubbing was evidently done in haste too; Horst Tappert's police inspector (another unnamed character) claims that Huston is the only one of the Medical Council still alive when he's just been told that Huston's corpse has been found! With police protection like this, no wonder the real survivor, Donen, is so nervous. *She Killed in Ecstasy* is enjoyably bizarre, but it would have benefitted enormously from another ten minutes of character development, and a bit more attention to detail. Slender narratives can cross the line into malnourishment, and this is one such instance. Even the killing of Donen's perfectly innocent wife is passed over without explanation or comment, though surely this is the point at which the murderer ceases to deserve our sympathy? The story comes to an end with dismaying abruptness: Mrs. Johnson steers her car into the sea, her dead husband strapped in at her side. The scene may be crude but it has terrible tragic resonance, prefiguring as it does the fate that would soon befall the film's intensely talented young star...

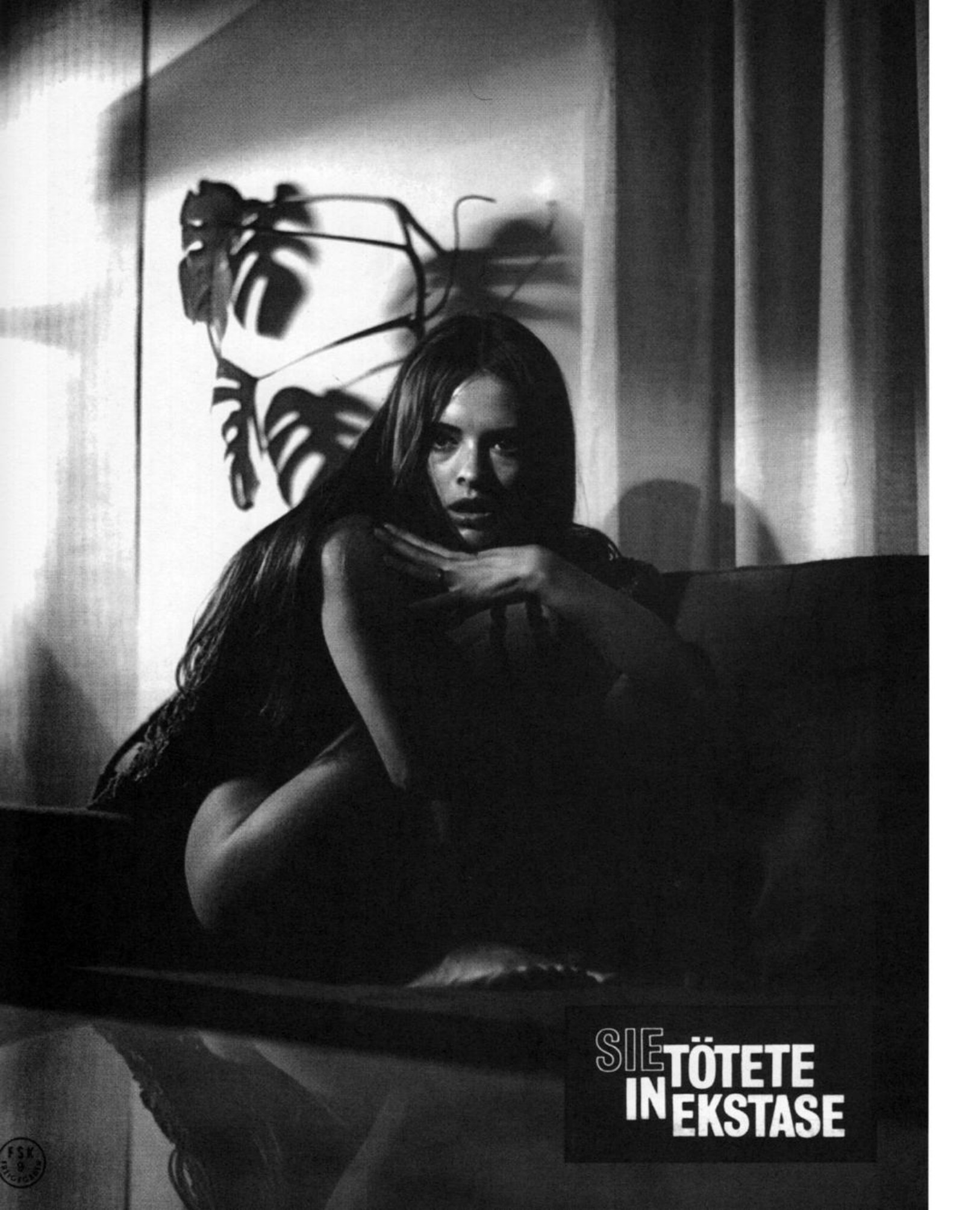
**Franco on screen:** As Donen, Franco plays the only victim to be tortured, which gives him the chance to enact a lurid S&M fantasy with himself as the quivering masochist and Soledad Miranda as the snarling sadist. Oh, the joys of being your own casting director...

**Cast and crew:** The ever-dependable Howard Vernon makes Walker an authoritarian windbag, leaning at a bar critiquing volatile youth for embracing chaos and 'immorality' then going on the prowl for sex with younger women. Just to ensure we regard him with contempt, Vernon came up with the idea of having Walker ostentatiously pray on his knees at his bedside before having sex with Soledad Miranda (who is posing as a hooker), leaving us in no doubt that the hypocritical old fool deserves all he gets.

**Music:** The music, by Manfred Hübner and Siegfried Schwab, is great fun in and of itself, but as noted it jars tremendously with the images. However, not all the cues are misjudged. When Johnson and his wife make love, the gentle theme for acoustic guitar and xylophone (*People's Playground Version D*) works beautifully, and there's a wonderfully delicate composition (*People's Playground Version C*) over Johnson's near-catatonic attempts to recuperate after his breakdown. However, the scene that really points to what could have been comes in the last ten minutes, when Mrs. Johnson is shown curled in a chair, remembering-or-hallucinating making love to her husband. Her eyes are deep wells of pain as she clenches her arms around her drawn-up knees; meanwhile a liturgical piece for choir and orchestra swells on the soundtrack, giving the story, at last, something of the emotional weight for which it's been crying out.

**Locations:** Here we encounter for the first time one of Franco's most beloved locations; La Manzanera, a modernist housing complex overlooking the bayside town of Calpe and the neighbouring Peñon de Ifach cliffs. It's composed of several extraordinary architectural constructions by the avant-garde architect Ricardo Bofill. Born in





**SIE TÖTETE  
IN EKSTASE**



top: Dr. Johnson (Fred Williams) finds his wife (Soledad Miranda) in the wreckage of his home laboratory after it's trashed by Johnson's furious peers.  
bottom: Dr. Johnson goes off the deep end ... and his wife uses her body to seduce his enemies (here Dr. Huston, played by Paul Müller) before murdering them one by one.

Barcelona, Bofill studied at the School of Architecture in Geneva, and in 1963 founded a group of architects, engineers, sociologists and philosophers under the name 'Taller de Arquitectura' (Architecture Workshop). The Manzanera complex is dominated by a building named Xanadu (Mrs. Johnson's home in *She Killed in Ecstasy*), a perverse and mysterious assemblage of jutting cubes, hanging perspectives and pseudo-crenellations. According to the architect's own website, "*The building takes the castle as its point of reference, and is evolved in such a way as to arrive at a configuration inspired by the nearby Peñon de Ifach crag. The unit of each apartment is composed of three cubes corresponding to living space, sleeping space and services. These three cubes are grouped around the vertical axis of the stair well which serves to support them. The openings in each cube reflect its orientation and function, without any a priori definition. In order not to be left with a cube as the exterior form, vernacular details and curving handrails and roofs were added.*"<sup>21</sup> The result is that forms seem to perch impossibly upon each other, assaulting the eye with their aggressive irregularity, yet possessing an internal harmony which holds together what could have been fragmented and preposterous. Xanadu would go on to feature prominently in Franco's *Countess Perverse* (1973), *Eugénie (Historia de una perversión)* (1980) and *Sola ante el terror* (1983). The restaurant, with its enormous glass 'porthole' windows, where Miranda stalks Paul Müller, is also part of the Manzanera complex ... The hotel from which Franco's Dr. Donen beats a hasty retreat after hearing about his colleagues' death is the Venta La Chata Hotel, about 5km out of Calpe on the road to Benissa ... *Obsession* reports that part of the film was shot in Portugal.

**Connections:** *She Killed in Ecstasy* is a minimalist remount of Franco's *The Diabolical Dr. Z* (1965) with a woman committing a string of murders to avenge a loved one who dies after being drummed out of the medical profession. However this time there's no proxy killer: Mrs. Johnson does the deed herself. The family dynamic is different too; a wife avenging her husband rather than a daughter avenging her father ... Soledad Miranda is seen reading *A Small Town in Germany* by John Le Carré ... When Mrs. Johnson kills Dr. Crawford, she pins a note to the corpse which reads "You are the second pig." This, combined with Vernon's diatribe against reckless and violent youth, suggests that the death of Sharon Tate (who died the year before) was fresh in Franco's mind while scripting the piece.

**Other versions:** At 74 minutes *She Killed in Ecstasy* feels too short, possibly due to the haste of production, but also perhaps because scenes were dropped after shooting. For instance, Horst Tappert's unnamed police officer refers to a previous meeting with Miranda, when we've seen nothing of the kind (it's either a missing scene, or was scripted but never shot) ... Some sources refer to a hardcore version released in France, with sex scenes added by French adult filmmaker Eric De Winter, featuring Marie-Noëlle Louvet and Marion Schultz. In fact the visa number and credit sequence of *She Killed in Ecstasy* were used illicitly by French distributor Inter

Ecran, for a porno film titled *Sylvia dans l'extase* (visa 42523 dated 19 February 1974). It's an entirely different film, not by Franco, and apparently features among its delights a dog mounting French porn actress Sylvia Bourdon. The whole thing is interspersed with sequences from Alphonse Beni's sex film *Les Tringleuses* (1978). Official French sources perpetuate the confusion, with release dates and running times relating to the wrong film.<sup>2</sup>

**Problematica:** Several sources list Mexican actor Germán Robles, supposedly appearing uncredited as a policeman. This seems unlikely as Robles was a properly billed actor appearing exclusively in Mexican movies at the time. Some sources also list Beni Cardoso as Donen's dead wife, however this is not the case.

## JULIETTE [Unfinished Film]

### Spain 1970

#### Alternative title

**Juliette de Sade**

#### Timeline

Shooting date	circa July	1970
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**Cast:** Soledad Miranda (Juliette). Paul Müller. Alberto Dalbés. Jess Franco.

**Credits:** director: Jess Franco. producer: Jess Franco. screenplay: Jess Franco. director of photography: Manuel Merino. still photography: Ramón Ardid.

**Synopsis:** *Juliette is a murderess compelled by forces she does not understand to seduce and then kill men. Afterwards, filled with remorse, she visits a church and prays feverishly for redemption. Her behaviour captures the attention of a man who sets about following her to discover her secret. Renting an adjoining room, he spies through a keyhole and sees Juliette disposing of bloody packages. Unable to resist the beautiful woman's allure, he makes contact with her...*

**Production notes:** While production continued on *Vampyros Lesbos* and *She Killed in Ecstasy*, Franco began squirrelling away material for another film, called *Juliette*. (Note: a still from *Juliette* was accidentally used in the promotion of *She Killed in Ecstasy*, featuring Soledad Miranda seen through a keyhole.) Based again on the work of the Marquis de Sade, *Juliette* starred Soledad Miranda and Paul Müller (a line-up mirroring the recent *Eugénie*) and drew on a small technical crew including cinematographer Manuel Merino. According to Franco about forty minutes were shot, and a rough cut assembled. He then showed this to producer



Artur Brauner, who decided on the basis of what he saw to sign a contract with Miranda, covering Franco's forthcoming *X312: Flight to Hell* and the completion of *Juliette*. Production, meanwhile, was already under way on another film, *The Devil Came from Akasava...*

## THE DEVIL CAME FROM AKASAVA

### Spain & West Germany 1970

Spanish depósito legal number: unknown

*Original theatrical title in country of origin*

**El diablo que vino de Akasawa** (SP)

**Der Teufel Kam aus Akasawa** (GER)

*Alternative titles*

**Una venere senza nome per l'ispettore Forrester** (IT theatrical) *Vénus without a Name for Inspector Forrester*

**El diablo de Akasawa** (SP alt. video-cover)

**El diablo que vino de A-Kasawa** (SP alt video-cover)

**The Devils of Caninde** (shooting title [MF])

*Production companies*

**Cooperativa Fénix Films** (Madrid)

**CCC Kunstfilm** (Berlin)

© 1970. CCC-Filmkunst (Berlin) [GER prints]

*Theatrical distributors*

**Cinerama Filmgesellschaft mbH** (Munich)

**C.E.A. Distribución, S.A.** (Madrid)

*Timeline*

Shooting date	21 June - 15 July	1970
Classified (GER)	18 February	1971
Germany premiere	05 March	1971
Italy (Genova)	05 June	1972
Rome	07 June	1972
Barcelona	12 November	1973
Seville	19 July	1974
Madrid	16 June	1975

*Theatrical running time*

Spain	84m
West Germany	84m

*Cast:* **Soledad Miranda** (Jane Morgan). **Fred Williams** ('Walter Forrester'). **Ewa Strömberg** (Ingrid Thorsson). **Horst Tappert** (Dr. Andrew Thorsson). **Alberto Dalbés** (Irving Lambert,

British consul). **Walter Rilla** (Lord Kinsley, clinic patron). **Ángel Menéndez** (Professor Forrester). **Paul Müller** (Dr. Henry). **Antonio Padilla** (Joao, Forrester's assistant). **Moisés Augusto Rocha** ('Arthur', surveillance cop at airport). **Siegfried Schürenberg** (Sir Philip of Scotland Yard). **Jess Franco** (Major Tino Celli of the Italian Secret Service). **Blandine Ebinger** (Abigail Kinsley). **Howard Vernon** (Humphrey, Sir Philip's new nurse). *uncredited:* **Karl-Heinz Mannchen** (police administrator speaking with Sir Philip).

*Credits:* director: **Jess Franco**. based on the book *The Devil Came from Akasava* [sic] by **Edgar Wallace** [sic]. adaptation & screenplay: **Ladislav Fodor**, **Paul Andre**, **Jess Franco**. dialogue: **Arne Elsholtz** [GER prints]. director of photography: **Manuel Merino**. editors: **María Luisa Soriano** [SP prints] / **Clarissa Ambach** [GER prints]. art director: **Karl Meyerberg**. music: **Odón Alonso** [SP prints] / **Manfred Hübner**, **Siegfried Schwab** [GER prints]. jazz solos: **Manfred Hübner**. produced by **Arturo Marcos Tejedor** [SP prints]. executive producer: **Karl-Heinz Mannchen** [GER prints]. production supervisor: **Karl-Heinz Mannchen** [SP prints]. production manager: **Luis María Lasala** [SP prints] / **Rudolph Hertzog, Jr.** [GER prints]. assistant producer: **Francisco Nuño**. assistant directors: **Rudolf Hertzog, Jr** [SP prints] / **Ana María Settimó de Esteva** [GER prints]. continuity: **Ana María Settimó de Esteva**. camera operator: **Sierghaid Mayes**. camera assistant: **Alberto Prous**. still photography: **Ramón Ardid**. make-up: **Rutz [Ruth] Keller**. assistant make-up: **Elisenda Villanueva**. assistant editor: **Domingo García**. wardrobe supplier: **Peris Hermanos**. colour by **Eastmancolor**. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid, S.A.**. sound re-recording: **Arcofón, S.A.**. music publisher: **Audio Tonstudio** (Berlin). *uncredited:* German producer: **Artur Brauner**.

**Synopsis:** *Akasava, near Mombasa, Kenya. Professor Forrester, a British geologist, discovers a mysterious rock crystal that can turn ordinary metals into gold, but which can burn flesh and destroy the human mind. The professor's assistant is shot by thieves who steal the rock. After rushing away to summon his friend Doctor Thorsson, Forrester himself goes missing in the jungle. Meanwhile in London, a man is murdered while attempting to burgle Forrester's office. The British Secret Service send special agent Jane Morgan to Akasava, operating undercover as an exotic dancer at the Red Rose Club, while British Consul investigator Irving Lambert poses as her husband. Also in the region is a detective from Scotland Yard, posing as Professor Forrester's non-existent nephew, Walter. Between them they encounter a variety of possible suspects, including the suave but chilly Doctor Thorsson, his bored and horny wife Ingrid, an Italian spy called Tino Celli, and Lord Kinsley, a wealthy aristocrat with ties to British Intelligence...*

**Production notes:** Before the rest of *Juliette* could be filmed, Franco started the next thirty-day wonder on his shooting schedule,

*The Devil Came from Akasava*. Shot between 21 June and 15 July in Alicante, Huelva, Lisbon, and CCC-Studios Berlin, this lightweight crime/spy caper in the mould of *Attack of the Robots* and *Golden Horn* professed to be based on the work of Edgar Wallace. Not one of Franco's more compelling or original efforts, there's little onscreen to mark *Akasava* out from the crowd. ... Offscreen, however, it's a very different story. On the 18th of August 1970, not long after completion of *Akasava*, Soledad Miranda – Franco's friend, screen muse, and most promising young discovery – was killed in a car wreck on the coastal roads North of Lisbon, Portugal. She was on her way to Lisbon to meet Franco and Karl Heinz Männchen, to sign a contract for future projects with Brauner's CCC. Tragically, her boyfriend lost control of their car on a steep bend; the young man survived, but Miranda was pronounced dead at the scene. Her early death left a permanent scar in Franco's psyche, and deprived the world of a rare and talented beauty...

**Review:** Who? What? Why? Where? Such is the inner voice of the viewer watching *The Devil Came from Akasava*, a madcap secret agent adventure that feels as though William Burroughs has been hacking at the script to make cut-ups. Unfortunately the raw material itself is pretty banal. This is meant to be a comic-strip spy thriller, but without the money to construct exciting action sequences Franco is forced to pad out his light-hearted tale with talk, talk, and lots more talk. Characters come and go and the plot darts around frantically, running only so far with an idea before dropping it absent-mindedly. What's needed is more cash for spectacular set-pieces, and a decent script replete with cool dialogue and a sense of irony. Sadly, Franco can't squeeze enough money from producer Artur Brauner, and the script, which mistakes incident for drama, is neurotically busy without being very amusing.

*The Devil Came from Akasava* isn't a complete wash-out. It has a manic, jittery quality, whipped up by a barrage of rapid zooms, short scenes, fast cutting and breezily demented music. However, the director's bee-in-a-bottle energy finds no real outlet as the story unfolds. Subsequent events are relentlessly inconsequential, and the denouement, with corrupt authority figures pointlessly explaining their villainy to each other, is no more exciting than the rest of the story. A major plot twist involving a wheelchair is thrown away, barely a minute before it could have been used more dramatically for a confrontation between the hero and the villain. It's as though there simply wasn't the will to squeeze surprises from the material. Franco clearly had little time for subtlety, and the pacing suffers accordingly. He's aiming for a sort of galloping Bond-lite frivolity, but without the means to create visually impressive pay-offs there's simply no chance of this happening. In tone the film is closest to *Sadisterotica* and *Kiss Me Monster*, but whereas they coasted along on the charms of their central characters, this film never sits still long enough to develop significant relationships (if *The Devil Came from Akasava* were a person it would be a speed dater with commitment

issues). By the time Soledad Miranda (playing a Secret Service spy called Jane Morgan) and Fred Williams (an undercover detective) have hooked up together we're half-way through the film, and to be honest they don't really generate sparks anyway. Little wonder; in a film trying to play the James Bond game it's amazing that Williams's character is never even granted a proper name. He's posing as 'Walter Forrester', the missing scientist's non-existent nephew, but we never find out who he really is; Jane just carries on calling him Walter (which, let's face it, is a lousy appellation for a sexy young hero).

As a fan of Miranda I'm tempted to say that she saves the film, and it's true that she lifts certain scenes with her beauty and aura of mystery. But this is not a good film for her – she's being hurried through a series of cut-price charades that don't really suit her bewitching presence. It's like watching a beautiful woman take part in an egg-and-spoon race – the rigmarole slightly demeans her even as she lifts it from total banality. Her nightclub scenes, which ought to have showcased her allure, are flawed by excess lassitude; as lovely as she is, one tends to think, 'Who the hell would pay good money to watch a woman stroking her stockings?' Franco has filmed some wild and sexy stage shows in his time, but this is definitely *not* his hottest ticket, nor is it one of his oneiric time-bending fantasies in which narcotic slowness is an end in itself.

*The Devil Came from Akasava* was the last film to feature Soledad Miranda before her death in an automobile accident. Although she'd apparently filmed all of her scenes when the crash occurred, post-production was still in progress. Little wonder then that *Akasava* feels so disjointed. In the last scene, Fred Williams's playboy spy returns to his hotel room and finds a blonde posing sensually in his bedroom doorway. But she's a nobody, definitely *not* the woman you'd expect to turn up at the end; Walter, after all, has been romancing Soledad Miranda's 'Jane Morgan' during the latter half of the film. It seems obvious that this final scene would have featured Miranda, had she lived. As things stand, the ending feels hastily tacked on (and it's out of focus too, understandably so if we consider the camera was probably held by the traumatised Franco himself). Maybe Franco had to shoot *something* for the ending, and quickly made do with another actress? Instead of a romantic clinch beneath the end credits, Soledad Miranda's last line is a quiet "Goodbye", delivered in sombre medium shot, framed in a doorway, four minutes from the end. And while I'm not keen on predestination theory, there *is* something uncanny about the content of her last screen work; a car crash at the end of *She Killed in Ecstasy*, and a sotto voce farewell here.

**Franco on screen:** Franco plays an Italian secret agent, Major Tino Celli, who's comically given the brush-off by an impatient Soledad Miranda. As the greasy lank-haired director cruises her at a bar, she cuts him off with the words, "I hate the smell of garlic!" (Or better still, "I hate pomade!" in the German version.)

**Cast and crew:** A significant arrival to the cast is Alberto Dalbés, born Francisco Eduardo Eyres Martínez on 3 April 1922 in

Rosario, Argentina. Dalbés would go on to work regularly with Franco, during a four-year period spanning *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein*, *Un silencio de tumba*, *Dracula's Daughter*, *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein*, *The Demons*, *Un capitán de quince años*, *Kiss Me Killer*, *Tender and Perverse Emanuelle* and *Night of the Skull*. He looks strikingly slimmer and healthier here than he would in his later appearances, cutting rather a debonair figure. Franco may not have given him the showiest roles, but he knew he could rely on the actor to convey sobriety and muted urbanity. In addition to the films already mentioned, Dalbés appeared in three unfinished Franco projects: *Juliette* (1970), *El castillo rojo* (1973) and *Relax Baby* (1973). He also appears in Umberto Lenzi's *A Quiet Place to Kill* (1970), Francisco Lara Polop's *Murder Mansion* (1972) and Javier Aguirre's *Hunchback of the Morgue* (1973). Dalbés died of a heart attack in Madrid, 14 September 1983, at the age of 61.

**Music:** Manfred Hübler and Siegfried Schwab are at it again, with many of the same themes from *She Killed in Ecstasy*. Here they're better suited to the film, giving the aforementioned jitteriness of Franco's style a musical dance partner.

**Locations:** Alicante & Huelva (Spain) & Lisbon (Portugal). As it's set in two places the production can't afford to visit - Kenya and London - *The Devil Came from Akasava* depends on stock shots of Big Ben, lots of Spanish or Portuguese palm trees, and an awful lot of indoor shooting. Spanish Franco expert Carlos Aguilar reports that some shooting took place at the caves of Navalcarnero, Villaviciosa de Odón, near Madrid.

**Studio:** Filmed at CCC-Studios (Berlin-Spandau).

**Connections:** *The Devil Came from Akasava* is supposed to be an Edgar Wallace adaptation but there's no discernible link to the writer. No such title resides in Wallace's bibliography, although a fictitious region of Africa called Akasava features in his controversial novel about white imperialism, *Sanders of the River* (1909). Given that this disagreeable novel portrays a heroic British imperial commander who quells native rebellion by such means as thrashing native chieftains with a rattan cane in front of their subjects, I can see no thematic links between the Wallace story and Franco's film except for the shared location (Akasava is the name of a Kenyan town in the film) ... The stone the villains are so keen to possess (and which emits radiation so devastating that men are burned after a few seconds' exposure) is a McGuffin purloined from the Robert Aldrich film *Kiss Me Deadly*; its effect is to darken the pigmentation of the victim's skin, which echoes the puzzlingly random effect of the 'robotizing' process in *Attack of the Robots* ...

**Other versions:** Both the English-language dub and the German-language subtitles add further confusion to an already incoherent plot by referring to the missing Dr. Forrester as 'Walter' (during the boatride to Akasava); for the rest of the film, however, this is the cover name of Fred Williams's character. The Spanish version perpetuates the problem, while the Italian theatrical release alludes to it in the title *Una venere senza nome per l'ispettore Forrester*, which translates as 'A Venus without a name for Inspector Forrester'

although ironically it's the Inspector himself who's nameless! The Spanish credits end with a dedication to Soledad Miranda.

**Press coverage:** In Spain, Only *ABC Andalucía* took the trouble to review this one: "Another work by Wallace is brought to the screen. Literary values vanish and what is emphasised, in contrast, is intrigue and terror ending in gruesomeness. Jesús Franco, a commercial filmmaker in every respect, also adds copious erotic notes so that the result flows better ... [He] tells all this in a somewhat jumbled way, with limited resources, attentive solely to the more anecdotal and spectacular aspects [...] concerned only with turning out a product of escapism, of simple consumption, a plane on which, and an objective to which, all the elements respond, including the performances. There are some beautiful locations in the province of Huelva, converted for the occasion - without much credibility - to a region of Africa."<sup>1</sup>

## X312 – FLIGHT TO HELL

### Spain & West Germany 1970

*Original theatrical title in country of origin*

**Vuelo al infierno** (SP) *Flight to Hell*

**X 312 Flug zur Hölle** (GER) *X 312 Flight to Hell*

*Alternative titles*

**X 312 ...Flug zur Hölle...** [GER theatrical poster]

**X 312 Vol pour l'enfer** (FR theatrical) *X312 Flight to Hell*

**Cehenneme Uçus** (TUR theatrical) *Flight to Hell*

**X 312 Voo para o inferno** (POR theatrical)

**Flight to Hell** (NL video cover - English language print)

**Infierno, tuya es la victoria** (SP shooting title)

*Hell, the Victory Is Yours*

**Die grüne Hölle des Amazonas** (GER shooting title)

*The Green Hell of the Amazon*

**Hölle, dein Sieg ist dir Sicher** (GER shooting title)

*Hell, the Victory Is Yours*

**Amazonas** (GER shooting title) *Amazon*

**A Good Day for Piranha Fish** (shooting title [*Variety*])

**X 312 ...vol pour l'enfer...** (FR theatrical poster)

**X 312 ...vol à l'enfer** (FR alt. [*Encyclocliné*])

*Production companies*

**Cooperativa Fénix Films** (Madrid)

**CCC Kunstfilm** (Berlin)

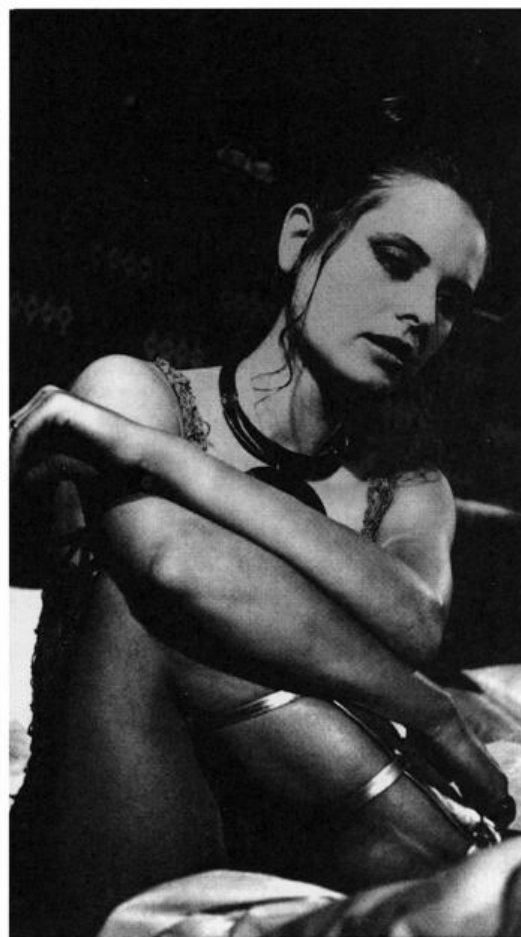
© 1970 CCC-Films [English-language prints]

*Theatrical distributors*

**C.E.A. Distribución S.A.** (Madrid)

**Cinerama Filmgesellschaft GmbH** (Munich)







*Timeline*

Shooting date	02 October to 04 November	1970
Classified (GER)	13 August	1971
Germany premiere	20 August	1971
French visa 39922 issued	15 June	1973
France	16 December	1973
Barcelona	28 January	1974
Madrid	27 May	1974
Portugal (Lisbon)	11 November	1974
Seville	1 June	1982

*Theatrical running time*

Spain	83m
West Germany	87m
France	84m

*Cast:* **Thomas Hunter** (Tom Nilson). **Fernando Sancho** (Bill González, the steward). **Esperanza Roy** (Anna María Vidal). **Gila von Weitershausen** (Steffi). **Hans Hass Jr.** (Carlos Rivas, a playboy). **Ewa Strömberg** (Mrs. Wilson). **Howard Vernon** (Pedro, a bandit). **Siegfried Shürenberg** (Alberto Rupprecht, Chilean bank president). **Paul Müller** (John Somers, aka 'Señor Carrasco'). **Antonio de Cabo** (Villarosa, Spanish aristocrat). *uncredited:* **Jess Franco** (Alfredo, Somers' aide). **Beni Cardoso** (Lolita, Beni's girl). **Pedro Besari** (bandit wearing orange scarf).

*Credits:* directed by **Jess Franco**. story & screenplay: **Jess Franco** & **Artur Brauner** [as 'Art Bern'] [SP prints] / **Artur Brauner** [as 'Art Bern'] [GER prints]. dialogue: **Mickey Knox**, **Arne Elsholtz** [GER prints]. director of photography: **Manuel Merino**. editors: **María Luisa Soriano** [SP prints] / **Carl-Otto Bartning** [GER prints]. music by **Wolf Hartmayer**, **Bruno Nicolai**. executive producer: **Arturo Marcos Tejedor** [SP prints] / **Karl-Heinz Mannchen** [GER prints]. production manager: **Rudolph Hertzog Jr.** [GER prints]. production supervisor: **Karl-Heinz Mannchen** [SP prints]. assistant producer: **Francisco Nuño**. assistant director: **Franz Eichhorn**. continuity: **Nicole Guettard**. camera operator: **Sierghaid Mayer** [sic]. camera assistant: **Alberto Prous**. still photography: **Karl Mayer**. set dresser: **Karl Meyerberg**. make-up: **Rutz [Ruth] Keller**. assistant make-up: **Elisenda Villanueva**. colour by **Eastmancolor**. laboratories: **Fotofilm & Berliner Union**. sound re-recording: **Arcofón S.A.**, **CCC Film Studio**. sound engineer: **Max Galinsky**. music publisher: **Sermi**. *uncredited:* producer: **Artur Brauner**. make-up: **Freddy Arnold**.

*Synopsis:* Tom Nilson, an American journalist, takes a plane from Chile to Brazil. Also on the flight are a Spanish woman called Anna María Vidal, a pampered American called Mrs. Wilson, Steffi, a Viennese girl en route to meet her fiancé in Rio, Carlos Rivas, the playboy son of a recently deposed Chilean politician, Mr. Villarosa, an elegant homosexual

from an aristocratic family, and the flight's coarse, unfriendly steward Bill González. All the passengers are leaving Chile for political or clandestine reasons. At a stop-off in Hileva, just over the Brazilian border, Villarosa opts to travel by other means and leaves the airport. Three more passengers embark; Alberto Rupprecht, a wealthy banker carrying a suitcase of precious jewels; Rupprecht's surly personal guard; and Alfredo, a young man who has been dispatched by Carrasco, a wealthy career criminal, to hijack the plane, steal Rupprecht's jewels, and force the pilot to land at a base belonging to Carrasco's bandit associate, Pedro. Alfredo fails to overpower the pilot, and the plane crashes in the jungle just a few miles short of Pedro's base. The survivors must trek through the jungle in search of safety, but their journey is complicated when everyone becomes aware of the contents of Rupprecht's suitcase...

**Production notes:** Franco was totally stunned by the news of Soledad Miranda's death. To the end of his days he carried with him the echo of that awful day, and in interviews on the subject he would often grow sombre and reflective. *Juliette*, of course, had to be shelved. Nevertheless, the dizzy whirl of filming continued. Next up was *X312 - Flight to Hell*, shot between 2 October and 4 November 1970. Actually a fairly well paced and enjoyable crime thriller, its relative clarity belies the emotional turmoil Franco must have been feeling (was he concentrating harder to avoid emotional collapse?). According to some accounts, had *Juliette* been finished after *The Devil Came from Akasava*, Soledad Miranda was lined up for a part in *X312* (Thomas Hunter, who stars in it, claims that Gila von Weitershausen took over the part intended for Miranda). It was filmed partly on location in Brazil, and by all accounts Miranda was preparing for a trip to Latin America when she died. However, in a conversation with Amy Brown (curator of an excellent website on Miranda) Jess Franco said: "We - Brauner and me - decided to make [*X312*] after Soledad's death."<sup>1</sup>

**Review:** One of the pleasures of delving deep into the career of Jess Franco is catching up with titles one had previously thought would be uninteresting, only to find that they're actually quite fun. *X312 - Flight to Hell* was the last Franco film of the 1970s that I watched while researching this book, so I was pleasantly surprised to discover, contrary to my expectation, that it's an entertaining thriller, feather-light but pacy, full of bickering, bitchy characters with venal motivations, and shot with a brisk confidence that may be zoom-happy in places but nevertheless gets the job done with a certain amount of brio. Perhaps there's a little too much wandering around in the jungle (anticipating all those cannibal films soon to follow in the 1970s), and the graphic violence is pretty mild even by Franco's usual standards, but there's enough going on to pull you through the foliage and prevent your mind from wandering.

Made immediately after *The Devil Came from Akasava*, *X312* shares with it a certain frivolity, but its narrative motor is far more effective. There's a sense of a story unfolding with clear aims and objectives, instead of the unsatisfying scattergun effect of the



earlier film. One might almost venture a subtext here too, with the characters fleeing from repressive Chile for liberal Brazil echoing Franco's decision to leave repressive Spain for the more liberated culture of France. Fernando Sancho essays another of his sleazy bad-guy roles, having a ball bumping off assorted minor characters and providing a solid black-hat character amid the double dealing. Elsewhere though, there's more than enough ambivalence and irony, and with a brutal disregard for tonal consistency Franco even sacrifices one of the more likeable characters to rape and murder, a twist that feels suddenly rather upsetting. Perhaps the recent death of Soledad Miranda accounts for the abrupt shift in tone? Franco's sensibility was always marked by ambiguity, but perhaps his then-recent experience reinforced the notion that wrenching twists of fate are always lurking?

The cast deliver their roles with occasional flair, especially Thomas Hunter who plays the laconic world-weary journalist to a tee. A fight between Hunter and Fernando Sancho in the back of an open-topped lorry is thrilling, with the occasionally out-of-focus camerawork adding to the sense of danger. Franco's oddball sense of humour is also in evidence; you have to love the goofy scene in which sexy Hans Hass Jr. seduces naive pretty-baby Gila von Weitershausen simply by whistling along to the radio and gazing intently into her eyes! However, haste is once again a clear influence on style, and anyone who gets a kick out of technical deficiencies will have a ball with the numerous errors: for instance, a journey by speedboat which crosses the line so egregiously the boat seems to double back on itself, or a plane crash shot with a hand-held camera in cramped cabin interiors, in which focus and image quality vary outrageously as characters stagger too close to the camera and lights. Of course we have to adjust our expectations for quickies like this; there's simply no point applying the criteria one brings to 'prestige productions' when it's clear the film is being made at whirlwind speed on next to no money. To Franco's credit, *X312* has plenty of manic charm despite such limitations.

Ultimately, while there's not a lot here that stays in the mind afterwards, this is one of Franco's more successful attempts to make a conventional film for tuppence. The story is clear, the characters are comprehensible, the pacing is lively, and the photography, though a trifle shaky, is attractive and interesting. No one raised purely on expensive studio pictures is going to excuse its technical shortcomings, but if you've ventured before into the exploitation jungle, and adjusted to the climate, you may find this is actually a decent little adventure tale.

**Franco on screen:** A brief role as lackey to Paul Müller's villain.

**Cast and crew:** Among the Franco regulars who've come along for the ride, Howard Vernon is deft and amusing as the arch but not *too* camp bandit chief Pedro ... Beni Cardoso plays Lolita, Pedro's tarty associate, and provides the film's only sexploitation thrill during a brief lesbian scene with Esperanza Roy's insidious gold-digger ... Antonio de Cabo (a Spanish theatre director who

fled to Portugal in the 1960s to get away from General Franco's regime) makes his first appearance for Franco, playing a camp queen who elects to leave the plane at a pit-stop and thus survives the slaughter to come, completing his trip to ogle Rio's "sun-bronzed youths" by car ... Ewa Strömberg gets the film's daffiest line as she struggles through dense vegetation after the crash: "*I love the jungle, it's so luscious!*"

**Music:** An orchestral score this time, by the obscure Wolf Hartmayer in collaboration with Bruno Nicolai. A sweepingly romantic title theme (shades of John Barry) does the job nicely, and it's a pleasure to hear a more traditional soundtrack after the omnipresent lounge-pop of the previous three films.

**Locations:** Scenes in the jungle and at the Santos Dumont Airport were shot in and around Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. It's likely that the plane sequences leading up to the crash were shot in the studios of CCC in Germany, with the 'stop-off' scenes (and the jungle temple, actually the Castle of Santa Barbara) shot in Alicante.

**Studio:** Filmed at CCC-Studios (Berlin-Spandau).

**Other versions:** The Spanish version trims the lesbian interlude with Beni Cardoso and removes the more intimate shots of Esperanza Roy.

**Problematica:** Some sources credit Antonio Mayans with an appearance as a hijacker; in fact Mayans would not join Franco's troupe until *Night of the Skull* in the autumn of 1973.

**Press coverage:** Barcelona's *La Vanguardia* heralded "[this] outlandish film by the amazing and always surprising Jesús Franco".<sup>2</sup> *ABC Andalucía*, however, were dismissive: "*The movie is heavy-going, full of incoherent situations. The acting at times falls into the ridiculous. The movie is definitely poor, with a theme that puts it in the adventure movie genre, and that could have been put to better use.*"<sup>3</sup>

## DER TODESRÄCHER VON SOHO

*The Deadly Avenger of Soho*

**Spain & West Germany 1971**

*Original theatrical title in (2nd) country of origin:*

**El muerto hace las maletas** (SP) *The Corpse Packs His Bags*

*Alternative titles*

**Allarme a Scotland Yard: sei omicidi senza assassino!** (IT theatrical) *Scotland Yard Alert: Six Murders with No Killer!*

**El muerto hizo las maletas** (SP video)

**Death Avenger** (export title [OB])

**Der Todesrächer** (GER shooting title) *The Deadly Avenger*

*Unconfirmed titles:*

**The Avenger** (UK TV)

*Production companies*

**Cooperativa Fénix Films** (Madrid)  
**CCC - Filmkunst** (Berlin) [GER prints]  
**Tele-Cine Film** (Berlin) [SP prints]  
 © 1972 CCC-Filmkunst, Berlin [GER prints]

*Theatrical distributors*

**Alianza Cinematografica Española S.L.** (Madrid)  
**Constantin-Film** (Munich)

*Timeline*

Shooting date	04-24 February	1971
Sitges Festival screening	02 October	1972
Classified (GER)	31 October	1972
Germany	09 November	1972
Barcelona	09 July	1973
Madrid premiere	13 May	1974
Italy (Rome)	03 July	1975

*Theatrical running time*

Spain	81m
West Germany	81m

**Cast:** **Fred Williams** (Inspector Robert Redford). **Elisa Montés** (Helen Reeds). **Horst Tappert** (Charles Barton, aka 'Bennett Reeds'). **Luis Morris** (Andy Pickwick, photographer). **Barbara Rütting** (Celia, the Flamingo Club hostess). **Siegfried Schürenberg** (Dr. Blatmore aka Lord Cronsedale). **Mara Laso** (Millie, Flamingo Club performer). **Eva Garden** (Lola, Redford's girlfriend). **Rainer Basedow** (Sergeant McDowell). **Moisés Augusto Rocha** (Roger, Flamingo Club bouncer). **Ángel Menéndez** (Redford's superior). **Wolfgang Kieling** (Ferencz, 2nd victim). **Dan Van Husen** (blackmailer/drug courier). **Guillermo Méndez** (Mr. Woods, 1st victim). **Jess Franco** (Mr. Gonzales, knife specialist). *uncredited:* **Andrés Monales** (Patakes aka 'Ponco', the knife-thrower). **Beni Cardoso** (Diana, Cronsedale's niece). **Emilio Martínez Lázaro** (hotel porter). **Karl Heinz Männchen** (bespectacled diner at restaurant).

**Credits:** directed by **Jess Franco**. based on the novel [Death Packs a Suitcase] by **Edgar Wallace**. adaptation & screenplay: **Artur Brauner** [as 'Art Bern'] & **Jess Franco**. director of photography: **Manuel Merino**. editors: **María Luisa Soriano** [SP prints] / **Renate Engelmann** [GER prints]. art directors: **Karl Meyerberg** [SP prints] / **Hans Jürgen Kiebach** [GER prints]. music: **David Kunne** [SP prints] / **Rolf Kühn** [GER prints]. incidental music: **Pablo Villa**. producer: **Arturo Marcos Tejedor** [SP prints]. executive producer: **Karl-Heinz Mannchen** [GER prints]. production supervisor: **Karl-Heinz Mannchen** [SP prints]. assistant producer: **Luis F. Rodríguez**. assistant director: **K. [Ruth] Keller**. continuity: **Ana María Settimó de Esteva**.

camera operator: **Javier Pérez Zofio**. focus puller: **Enrique Díaz de Diego**. make-up: **Elisenda Villanueva**, **Tomasa Benito**. colour: **Eastmancolor**. laboratory: **Fotofilm, S.A.**. sound re-recording: **Arcofón, S.A.** & **CCC Film**. sound: **Max Galinsky**. music publisher: **Schacht Musikverlage** (Hamburg). *uncredited:* German producer: **Artur Brauner**.

**Synopsis:** *A mysterious knife-throwing killer who packs the bags of his victims has Scotland Yard baffled. There appears to be no connection between the victims, and Inspector Robert Redford is under pressure to solve the case or suffer the professional consequences. Press photographer Andy Pickwick contributes to the investigation, as does famous crime novelist Charles Barton. Suspicion falls on Dr. Blatmore, who was present at one of the murder sites. Blatmore's secretary Helen Reeds discovers a drug called mescadrin, "five times stronger than heroin", in her boss's bag. She tells Inspector Redford about her deceased husband Bennett Reeds, an American FBI agent implicated in a drug scandal involving mescadrin, who died in mysterious circumstances four years ago. Can there be a connection between his death and the current murders? After Bennett died, Helen had received a call telling her to inform Bennett that he should visit a Dr. Blatmore in London. She decided to take a job with Blatmore to investigate. Meanwhile Barton's investigation, with help from a blind organ-grinder seen earlier near one of the killings, leads him to the Flamingo Club, a front for a drug-running operation. Barton tries to help a young woman suffering a drug frenzy but she throws herself from a window. The unseen female boss of the Flamingo gives the order to her deputies, Roger and Celia, for Barton to be eliminated. However, he survives and returns to put pressure on Celia. She tells him when the next drugs consignment is due. Barton overpowers the driver and forces him to drive back to base; Cronsedale Castle. Lord Cronsedale (aka Doctor Blatmore) and his niece Diana, shadowy owner of the Flamingo Club, run a drug manufacturing business there; they cook up mescadrin in a laboratory in the cellar and then sell it via the club. Looking at photos taken by Pickwick, Helen realises that Charles Barton is in fact her husband, Bennett Reeds; after meeting with him, she tells Redford all she knows. At the castle, Diana tells Lord Cronsedale that his secretary Helen is in league with the police. Deciding that the operation is getting too risky in England, Cronsedale announces that he, Diana, Celia and Roger will fly to Rio the following day. He orders Celia and Roger to abduct Helen and bring her back to the castle. Pickwick manages to follow them and phones Redford. At Cronsedale Castle, Bennett Reeds murders Diana, then places a suitcase in the hall. Realising that he is marked for death, Cronsedale tries to escape but is felled by a knife thrown by the organ-grinder, who is in fact not blind at all but a circus performer from Europe called Patakes, aka 'Ponco', whom Reeds has been paying to commit the murders in return for a share of Cronsedale's wealth. Reeds, who faked his own death, has been posing as a British crime author to hunt down and murder mescadrin dealers in revenge for his own addiction. Redford arrives at Cronsedale Castle and shoots Patakes in the face. After Reeds kills the remaining gang members, Redford confronts him, but he refuses to surrender. The two men shoot at each other: Bennett Reeds is killed and Redford leaves with Helen.*

**Production notes:** Three months after *X312*, Franco shot *El muerto hace las maletas*, an adaptation of a novel by Bryan Edgar Wallace which Artur Brauner's CCC Filmkunst had already filmed once before, in 1962, as *Das Geheimnis der schwarzen Koffer* ('The Secret of the Black Suitcase'). At that time, CCC were in direct competition with Rialto Film, a West German company who were enjoying massive commercial success with a stream of 'krimis' (German-made crime thrillers) based on the novels of British author Edgar Wallace (the first being *Der Frosch mit der Maske* in 1959). Unable to obtain rights to any of the Wallace novels, Brauner and CCC took the clever step of buying rights to the work of Wallace's son, Bryan Edgar Wallace. As both men were prolific in the crime fiction field it was a profitable gambit, and it helped that some of the son's works were almost as effective as the father's. By the time of Franco's adaptation, however, the cycle was just about over. The 'krimi' phenomenon is often said to have ended with Umberto Lenzi's *Das Rätsel des silbernen Halbmonds* aka *Seven Blood-Stained Orchids*, a German-Italian co-production unofficially based on story ideas drawn from Wallace and Cornell Woolrich, released in Germany in June 1972. However despite being made earlier *El muerto hace las maletas* didn't arrive in German cinemas until November 1972, so one could argue that Franco's was the last true example of the form.

**Review:** *El muerto hace las maletas* is a very handsomely shot and reasonably entertaining detective story, with good production values, a solid cast, and plenty of visual inventiveness, factors which help to alleviate one's impatience with the tangled and obscurely motivated plot. There are quite a few puzzles and missing links, such as an unhelpful mix-up with the name used by a key character – Charles Barton in dialogue, James Barton on his passport and nameplate. It may not seem much, but in a film like this you never know how important such details could be, so it's a bit frustrating to find it's an accident! (A similar mix-up with names afflicted *The Devil Came from Akasava*; evidently the scripts were churned out so fast that no one had time to check for mistakes.) As it is, genuine plot twists are glancingly elaborated and then tangled up with non-sequitur elements and flagrant illogicalities. For instance, quite why Lord Cronsedale, one of the landed gentry, is moonlighting as a drug-pushing G.P. (he has a secretary and patients and everything) remains a mystery to me even after three or four viewings. It's also never explained how American drugs cop Bennett Reeds has managed to pass himself off as Charles Barton, a well-known writer of crime novels, without anyone suspecting the truth, though I suppose it must have been easier to hoodwink people in the days before Google image search. It's clear from the dialogue that Barton the novelist really exists; there are three of his books in Inspector Redford's apartment. Yet it turns out that the name 'Charles Barton' was stolen from a deceased convict who died in the USA. Surely Bennett Reeds hasn't gone to the trouble of writing three crime novels just to create a false identity

for himself? If so, he's been surprisingly successful at it; apparently one of them sold over three million copies. As for the role played by Dan Van Husen, he first pops up as a blackmailer who knows Barton's secret, then appears again later as a drug courier for the villains, a coincidence the script doesn't bother to elucidate. Meanwhile Patakes gives 'Barton' a lead to the Flamingo Club, but when Barton arrives the hostess, Cynthia, already knows him and treats him like a regular. All in all this is a messy script that appears never to have been checked for inconsistencies, which is a shame because with a little more time spent sweating the detail it would work very well.

*El muerto hace las maletas* is an uncharacteristically chaste film for Franco. No lesbian scenes, no nudity, and no sleaze, a state of affairs seemingly alluded to by the character of Pickwick, a photographer who keeps accidentally showing people sexy snaps instead of the crime scene photographs he's being paid for. Perhaps Franco felt constrained by the Edgar Wallace proprieties of the story and included this as a joke about suppressed desire? The film's more overt attempts at comedy, such as Pickwick's camp persona and the Goon Show *boinnng!* the knives make as they hit the victims, are pretty corny, but the real humour lies between the cracks of this film; the eccentric stylishness of the production conveys a subtle wit its own. Apparently it was once shown on British TV as 'The Avenger', and although I haven't been able to verify this it suggests that there is an English language print out there somewhere. The nod to the *Avengers* TV series is not altogether misplaced: the outbursts of baroque visuals, the shaggy-dog plotting, the eccentric and/or sadistic minor characters, all feel quite similar; all that's missing is the warm and spirited male-female relationship at the heart of the TV series. If this had been another of Franco's 'Red Lips' films, with Janine Reynaud and Rosanna Yanni investigating, instead of bland Euro-hunk Fred Williams quivering indecisively between Eva Garden and Elisa Montés, like a blasé playboy at a society party, it would be far more memorable. Instead, what stays in your mind afterwards is the compositional elegance of the photography and mise-en-scène. There are some truly lovely shots involving mirrored hallways, spiral staircases, ornate balustrades, fluorescently illuminated nightclub table-tops, and a classic 'shot from underneath' moment peering at two characters through a glass coffee table strewn with bottles and decanters. Add to this a constant barrage of wide-angles, fish-eye lenses and deep focus and you'll rarely see a more stylish and exuberantly mannered Seventies crime thriller. Franco adds great lustre to the visuals by using extreme lensing to grossly elongate and deepen spatial compositions, such as the knife-throwing room at Scotland Yard (I'm sure they have such a thing) or the classic madman's laboratory of Lord Cronsedale, with its bubbling vials and World War II electronic spares. And if a villain (especially that nasty brute Moisés Augusto Rocha) is going to stamp on someone's head, you can't beat having a wide-angle lens peer up from ground level to give the moment a lovely frisson of the old ultra-violence (in fact



the film uses visual stylisation so relentlessly that it comes as a surprise to note that Franco shot the thing six whole months before Kubrick's fisheye-tastic *Clockwork Orange*). The only thing that lets the film down visually is the use of a 'scrim' (a gauze filter) over the lens for certain scenes; unfortunately the focus puller miscalculated and we can see it for what it is.

So yes, dig the visuals, but the fact that this is supposed to be a thriller can lead to thwarted expectations. Franco is still shoving important new characters into the story five or ten minutes before the end; this is typical of his crime stories, which sprawl around willy-nilly, refusing to pull narrative focus for the climax, as if the project is supposed to be a mini-series and just getting started. Something that really ought not to happen during the climax of a film like this is for plot information to be casually relayed by telephone! The use of a phone to pump vital detail into a scene is a soggy, deflationary tactic at the best of times, but the hero should really *not* be hanging around taking calls in his Scotland Yard office with only seven minutes of story to go! The situation is only redeemed thanks to Horst Tappert, who brings a sweaty, up-all-night instability to his portrayal of the complex and damaged Barton/Reeds during the final stand-off at Cronsedale Castle. Shot in long, gated tunnels, with lots of wide-angle lensing, the film at last unites beautiful visuals with a well-crafted performance; showing, with scant seconds to go, what's been lacking in this very attractive but persistently underdeveloped drama.

**Franco on screen:** Franco plays Gonzalez, an expert knife thrower consulted by Scotland Yard who advises them that the killer must be a true expert and says, "I'd like to meet him. He may be a murderer to you but he's an esteemed peer to me." Evidently he still had *Eugenie's* amoral Attila Tanner in his system... (Franco also appears to be playing a passerby rubbernecking at the first murder site, although he keeps his back to the camera.)

**Cast and crew:** Fred Williams (real name Friedrich Wilhelm Löcherer) appeared in seven Jess Franco films, ranging from *Count Dracula* (probably his stand-out role, as Jonathan Harker) to *Le Jouisseur*, in which he plays the character referred to in the shooting title, 'Roland the Sexiest Man in the World'. A pleasant actor by and large, he can be breezy, casually playful, or totally forgettable; there's often something a little uncommitted about his performances, as though he's not entirely focussed on what he's doing. He appeared in two Fellini films, *Juliette of the Spirits* (1965) and *And the Ship Sailed On* (1983), and in 1977 he had the unique distinction of appearing in both *Red Nights of the Gestapo* and *A Bridge too Far* ... Alongside CCC regulars like Horst Tappert and Siegfried Schürenberg, *El muerto hace las maletas* features Emilio Martínez Lázaro, here playing a nervous hotel porter with a distinct resemblance to Woody Allen. Lázaro went on to become a respected director of Spanish dramas and comedies, but at the time he was just starting out. In 1973 he provided the script for León Klimovsky's *The Dracula Saga* and in 1976 co-wrote *Pascual Duarte*, an adaptation of the existential Spanish novel by Camilo

José Cela (directed by Jess Franco's nephew Riccardo Franco). Lázaro's first feature-directing credit came with an obscure, but highly imaginative horror anthology called *Pastel de sangre* (1971), for which he directed the "Victor Frankenstein" segment ... Pretty brunette Elisa Montés makes the third of her three appearances for Franco (99 *Women* and *The Girl from Rio* being the others) playing the love interest for Fred Williams's playboy cop ... Spaghetti Western mainstay Dan Van Husen, as a creepy drug courier in the pay of Lord Cronsedale, makes the first of four appearances in Franco's films (excluding a couple of unfinished projects), the others being *Night of the Skull*, *Tender and Perverse Emanuelle* and *Kiss Me Killer* ... Karl Heinz Männchen can be seen at a dinner table in the scene where Williams and Montés dine out together.

**Music:** Rolf Kühn's music here is brisk, exciting, occasionally chilling, and helps maintain the penny-dreadful crime ambience perfectly; some elements would be recycled for the following Franco opus, *La venganza del doctor Mabuse*.

**Locations:** Although set in the parks and streets of central London, and the backstreets of London's Soho, only a handful of establishing shots were genuinely filmed in the UK, as was the fashion with low budget European films of the period. Shooting actually took place on location in Alicante, Barcelona and Murcia. Although the German title translates as 'The Deadly Avenger of Soho', it's regrettable that London's premiere red light district plays no meaningful role in the story; there's not a strip joint or porno store in sight, unlike, say, *7 Murders for Scotland Yard*, made the same year by Franco's contemporary José Luis Madrid ... Continental cars driving on the right give the game away that we're probably not in London! ... The Santa Barbara Castle in Alicante doubles as the interior of a London church with the addition of a few pews to the entrance hall; twenty minutes later it's also pressed into service as the cellar laboratory of the drug-dealing villains ... The grand interior of the Barton residence was filmed at La Gran Casino in Murcia, the exterior of which provided one of the locations for *Count Dracula*.

**Studios:** Estudios Balcázar (Barcelona).

**Connections:** Based on the novel 'The Corpse Packs His Bags' by Bryan Edgar Wallace, the story was previously filmed as *Das Geheimnis der schwarzen Koffer* (Werner Klingler, 1962), also produced by Artur Brauner ... 'Krimi' is a German term, short for either 'Kriminalroman' (crime novel) or 'Kriminalfilm' (crime movie), and can refer to any crime-related novel or film. An Agatha Christie novel would be a 'Krimi'. A Film Noir? A Krimi. Sherlock Holmes stories? They're Krimis too. However, among movie buffs at least, the term is more closely associated with a series of German crime film productions made by Rialto and CCC Filmkunst from the late 1950s to the early 1970s.

**Other versions:** The Spanish and German versions are virtually identical (except for the dubbing). Neither the English language export print nor the TV version *The Avenger* has so far turned up. According to *La Stampa's* film critic, in the Italian version –

lavishly retitled *Allarme a Scotland Yard: sei omicidi senza assassino!* – the murders are designated as taking place every Saturday.<sup>1</sup>

**Problematica:** Horst Tappert's character is called Charles Barton in the English-language dub, however paperwork clearly visible onscreen confusingly identifies him as *James* Barton.

**Press coverage:** In October 1972 Franco took the film to the Sitges Film Festival in Spain where it received a thumbs-up from *Variety*'s festival reporter, who described it as a “*Snappy, well-paced though confusing crime thriller*”. The review praised the film's “*quick intercutting, touches of wry humour and okay acting*”, and concluded, “*Though plenty of loose ends are left dangling, lively editing, odd camera angles, a pinch of sex and okay technical credits make pic a marketable item for double billers*”.<sup>2</sup> On its Spanish release nine months later it received a few mildly appreciative notices, including one that declared, “*Franco captures well the atmosphere of mystery, although he doesn't keep a steady hand. He knows how to use the resources of the genre, and seems at ease within the intricacies of mystery, where the unknown reigns*.”<sup>3</sup> Another acknowledged, “*Jesús Franco follows the genre's guidelines, with scenes in semi-shadow, filmed from angles that produce the desired effect of panic in the protagonist, or humour mixed in to make the film more entertaining*.”<sup>4</sup>

#### Timeline

Shooting date	25 Feb-12 March	1971
Berlin premiere	26 December	1972
Barcelona	18 November	1974
Spanish 'moral classification'*	11 July	1975
Seville	29 August	1975

No record of Madrid release

\* *National Catholic Confederation of Parents classification.*

#### Theatrical running time

West Germany	88m
Spain	97m

**Cast:** **Fred Williams** (Sheriff Bromer Thomas). **Ewa Strömberg** (Jennifer Paganini, aka 'Jennifer Herring the Pussy Cat'). **Jack Taylor** (GER - Dr. Cranko/SP - Dr. Mabuse aka Professor Farkas). **Roberto Camardiel** (Sultan, a drunk). **Moisés Augusto Rocha** (Andros, the monster). **Gustavo Re** (Malou, Thomas' sidekick). **Eva Garden** (Wanda Orloff). **Ángel Menéndez** (Professor Parkinson). **Friedrich Joloff** (Hermann, Cranko's male assistant). **Linda Hastreiter** (Helen Coleman, first victim abducted by Andros). **Wolfgang Kieling\***. **Guillermo Méndez** (Parkinson's CIA contact). **Jess Franco** (Mr. Crosby, Sheriff Thomas's superior). **Siegfried Lowitz** (Professor Orloff, Wanda's uncle). *uncredited:* **Beni Cardoso** (Leslie, Cranko's assistant). **Andrés Monales** (John Paganini, Jennifer's boyfriend). **Manuel Merino** (Marks, FBI Agent). \*credited onscreen but not visible in any available prints.

**Credits:** directed by **Jess Franco**. story: **Jess Franco**. screenplay: **Jess Franco & Artur Brauner** [as 'Art Bernd']. director of photography: **Manuel Merino**. editor: **Jesús María Pisón / Renate Engelmann** [GER prints]. art director: **Karl Meyerberg**. music: **David Khune / Rolf Kühn** [GER prints]. executive producer: **Arturo Marcos Tejedor / Karl-Heinz Mannchen** [GER prints]. production supervisor: **Karl-Heinz Mannchen** [SP prints]. assistant director: **Rudolf Hertzog, Jr.** continuity: **Ana María Settimó de Esteva**. camera operator: **Javier Pérez Zofio**. art director: **Hans Jürgen Kiebach**. make-up: **Ángeles Otal, Ruth Keller**. colour by **Eastmancolor**. sound: **Max Galinsky**. music publisher: **Schacht Musikverlage** (Hamburg). *uncredited:* Copercines producer: **Eduardo Manzanos Brochero**. Tele-Cine producer: **Artur Brauner**.

'Reborn! A mind dedicated to evil' - Spanish adline

**La venganza del doctor Mabuse synopsis:** *Fresno, USA. Dr. Mabuse, using the pseudonym Professor Farkas, is plotting a comeback from his secret base in an abandoned lighthouse, assisted by his sidekick Hermann, his female associate Leslie, and his brain-damaged slave Andros. Mabuse has discovered a means to control the will of others using*

## LA VENGANZA DEL DOCTOR MABUSE

*The Vengeance of Dr. Mabuse*

### Spain & West Germany 1971

*Original theatrical title in (2nd) country of origin*

**Dr. M schlägt zu** (GER) *Dr. M Strikes Back*

#### Alternative titles

**Dr M schlägt zu** (GER poster)

**El doctor Mabuse** (SP shooting title announced in Spanish magazine *Terror Fantastic* March 1972)

**Mabuse 70** (GER shooting title)

**Der Doktor Mabuse** (GER shooting title)

**Der Mann, der sich Mabuse nannte** (GER shooting title) **Dr**

**Mabuse n'est pas mort** (from a 1972 French filmography)

#### Production companies

**Cooperativa Fénix Films** (Madrid)

**Copercines** (Madrid)

**Tele-Cine Film-und Fernsehproduktion** (Berlin)

© 1972. **Tele-Cine, Berlin** [GER prints]

#### Theatrical distributors

**Rosa Films** (Barcelona)

**CCC Filmkunst GmbH** (Berlin)

a form of radiation emitted by samples of moon rock currently held at the McDowell Research Institute; his plan is to create an army of mind-controlled puppets who will do his will and take over the world. Mabuse despatches Leslie and Andros to steal the moon-rocks and put fake ones in their place, and then sends them to abduct Helen Coleman, a young woman upon whom he can conduct his mind control experiments. The abduction is witnessed by Jennifer Paganini, a nightclub dancer, who lives next door to Helen with her boyfriend John. Mabuse's radiation experiment destroys Helen's brain and he orders Andros to dispose of her in the ocean. Hermann suggests to Mabuse that the only scientist who could possibly threaten him is a certain Professor Orloff. Jennifer visits the newly appointed Sheriff Thomas and tells him what she saw the night Helen was abducted. Somehow, Mabuse finds out and sends Leslie to visit Jennifer at the Red Garter Club, posing as an artist's agent. Sheriff Thomas and his assistant Malou, who are watching outside, see the two women leave together and try to give chase, but their car breaks down. Leslie takes Jennifer to a deserted office block where she's overpowered by Andros and taken to the lighthouse. As Andros and Leslie drag the unconscious woman inside, they're spied upon by a passing vagrant. Meanwhile, Professor Orloff informs his niece, Wanda Orloff (Sheriff Thomas's girlfriend), that he intends to visit the McDowell Institute to view the moon-rocks. The vagrant goes to Sheriff Thomas and reports what he saw at the lighthouse. Bizarrely, Thomas ignores the information. Meanwhile, Mabuse subjects Jennifer to the mind-control radiation, and Sheriff Thomas interviews Jennifer's boyfriend John about her disappearance. At the McDowell Institute, Doctor Orloff's associate Professor Parkinson informs the Director that Orloff has examined the moon-rocks and discovered they're fakes. Parkinson plans to alert the FBI, but before he can do so he is accosted by Jennifer, who is now a transmitter for Mabuse's will. Through her, Mabuse orders Parkinson to call off the investigation and tell the FBI that the rocks are genuine. He obeys. Mabuse then sends Andros to a security establishment called Point Virginia to recover Orloff's incriminating evidence from a safe. After somehow eavesdropping on a meeting between Parkinson, Orloff and FBI Agent Marks, Mabuse orders Andros and Leslie to kill Orloff and bring Wanda to the lighthouse. Thomas's men report that they've followed Wanda's tire tracks but they stop at the coast near an abandoned lighthouse. Andros, who has become emotionally attached to the woman he's abducted, can take it no more and goes berserk. He strangles Hermann and Leslie and attacks Mabuse, who stumbles into a bank of circuitry and dies of electrocution. Andros carries Wanda out of the burning lighthouse, while John and the vagrant pull up in a car and rescue Jenny. Thomas and Malou arrive and shoot Andros dead.

**Dr. M schlägt zu synopsis:** *The USA, just North of the border with Mexico. A female employee of the McDowell Institute for Laser Technology is abducted from her apartment by a sinister man and woman. The abduction is witnessed by Jennifer Paganini, a nightclub dancer, who lives next door with her boyfriend John. At an abandoned lighthouse we meet a man known as Doctor Cranko, who has been commissioned by a major crime syndicate to obtain secret documents kept at the*

*McDowell Institute relating to the construction of a new super-weapon. With his sidekick Hermann, he hopes to use the abducted girl to furnish information about the secret papers. Meanwhile, the local policeman, Sheriff Thomas, is ordered by his boss, Crosby, to hurry up and solve the case. Under hypnosis the young woman divulges that the papers are about to be transferred from the Institute by security van. Andros is ordered to dispose of the girl; she manages to break free but Andros catches up with her on the beach and strangles her. He and Leslie are then despatched to hijack the van, steal the secret papers and replace them with false ones. At the police station, Jennifer comes forward and describes what she saw on the night of the abduction. Meanwhile Cranko realises that the stolen information is encrypted. The criminal organisation employing him will demand the papers in two days; Cranko decides to extract the codes from one of the scientists at the Institute. Hermann is aware, thanks to the Sheriff's corrupt boss, Crosby, that Jennifer has spoken to the police; he suggests that she be abducted to be used as bait for one of the scientists, Professor Orloff. Cranko sends Leslie to visit Jennifer at the Red Garter Club, posing as an artist's agent. Sheriff Thomas and his assistant Malou, who are watching outside, see the two women leave together and try to give chase, but their car breaks down. Leslie takes Jennifer to a deserted office block where she's overpowered by Andros and taken to the lighthouse. As Andros and Leslie drag the unconscious woman inside, they're spied upon by a passing vagrant. Professor Orloff informs his niece, Wanda Orloff (Sheriff Thomas's girlfriend), that certain papers were stolen from the Institute, although the thieves failed to gain the most important item. Currently, the FBI and the CIA are fighting over who should investigate. Cranko and Hermann manage to bug a meeting between the FBI Agent Marks and Professor Orloff; they hear mention of a safe containing the encryption codes. Cranko orders Andros and Leslie to kill Orloff and bring Wanda to the lighthouse, then subjects Jennifer to his mind-control device. He sends her to the Institute to hypnotise Professor Parkinson into revealing the whereabouts of the safe. Parkinson discusses security with a man from the CIA, then bumps into Jennifer, who hypnotises him. He tries to telephone the CIA to warn them but he's killed before he can explain. Cranko then sends Andros with two hired hoodlums to the McDowell Institute on an armed raid to blow open Orloff's safe and steal the encryption codes. The hoods are killed in an armed battle with security guards; Andros escapes and returns to the lighthouse. There he is berated by Hermann, and unable to take it anymore, he goes berserk. He strangles Hermann and Leslie and attacks Cranko, who stumbles into a bank of circuitry and dies of electrocution. Andros carries Wanda out of the burning lighthouse, while John and the vagrant pull up in a car and rescue Jenny. Thomas and Malou arrive and shoot Andros dead.*

**Production notes:** The final film in the West German production package that began with *Vámpyros Lesbos* in 1970, *La venganza del Dr. Mabuse* was shot immediately after *El muerto hace las maletas*, between 25 February and 12 March 1971. Franco made four films for Artur Brauner's CCC and Tele-Cine production companies in 1971 but he didn't deliver them until 1972, a delay that infuriated Brauner and led to the end of their association. In the meantime



Franco busied himself with a string of films for other producers, a fact that cannot have helped soothe Brauner's impatience. To make matters worse, when Brauner finally saw the films he found two of them distinctly lacking. *Dr. M schlägt Zu* and *Jungfrauen Report* were too short, in fact barely completed, a failing for which he mostly blamed producer Karl-Heinz Mannchen (who produced the films, along with Franco, based on Brauner's suggested storylines). To salvage the projects Brauner ordered additional shooting. For *Jungfrauen Report* he employed softcore director Hubert Frank to shoot street interviews in Berlin, whilst for *Dr. M schlägt Zu* he sent dubbing director Arne Elsholtz (who dubbed most of Brauner's international productions at that time) to the original Spanish locations. According to Ensholtz, this material was filmed principally at a futuristic looking congress centre and the only member of the lead cast involved was Moises Augusto Rocha (playing the monster). Judging by his description Ensholtz must therefore have shot the heist sequence, which occurs only in the German version. The question of who re-edited Franco's version of the Mabuse story to create *Dr. M schlägt Zu* remains difficult to answer. Hubert Frank and Arne Elsholtz only shot the new material; probably it was left to editor Renate Engelmann (credited on German prints) to construct the new version. But was it done under Franco's supervision? Guiskard Oberparleiter (to whom my thanks for this information) interviewed Franco several times in the 2000s and ascertained that he did sometimes edit his films at Brauner's studios in Berlin (Franco clearly remembered working with Brauner's associates Clarissa Ambach, editor of *Vampyros Lesbos*, *She Killed in Ecstasy* and *The Devil Came from Akasava* – and Carl Otto Bartning, editor of *X312 - Flight to Hell*). Unfortunately the subject of Renate Engelmann didn't arise, so it's hard to say whether Franco re-edited the four 1971 films in Berlin in 1972, or if he edited them alone in Spain, after which Engelmann or someone else was responsible for the final German release versions. The latter explanation seems more likely; I suspect that the shorter, less coherent version on Spanish video is Franco's first cut, with the longer German version edited later by Engelmann.

**Review:** As a contribution to a cinematic phenomenon initiated by Fritz Lang's *Dr. Mabuse the Gambler* (1922) and *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* (1933), Jess Franco's *La venganza del doctor Mabuse* can seem a trifle threadbare. Considered alongside the six Mabuse films produced by Artur Brauner between 1960 and 1964, however, it fares rather better. Although the 1960s Mabuse films benefitted from the stability of studio shooting, they could be quite stiff and overly talky, not unlike some of the less enthralling Edgar Wallace 'krimis' produced around the same time by CCC Filmkunst and their competitors Rialto. Franco's film, shot swiftly and cheaply on location, may lack formal tidiness (and how!) but it compensates with a beguiling eccentricity. Put together with spit, sellotape and brazen cheek, it's a piece of amusing gibberish, a frivolous confection with a pop-art sensibility that revives some of

the original spirit of Mabuse (creator Norbert Jacques was heavily influenced by the 'pop culture' of his day, chiefly Fantômas and Fu Manchu). Franco brings to the screen a comic-strip visual palette, shooting fast and loose but with a great eye. His customary flair for marvellous locations and interiors is very much in evidence (like Mario Bava, Franco really knows how to wring screen magic out of artfully lit corridors and staircases), and in its best sequences the film has a giddy freewheeling energy. There's also a great jazz score and some inventive camerawork, including several rather wonderful sequences in which Franco shamelessly distorts the image with extreme wide-angle lensing, worthy of Robert Fuest and the *Dr. Phibes* films. An abduction scene that takes place in an empty shopping arcade is a fantastic collision of Expressionist angles and Modernist architecture, Mabuse's laboratory is a primary-coloured cave of World War 2 technology and sci-fi flashing lights, and Franco once again adds a tinge of the surrealistic TV series *The Avengers*, as Mabuse's assistants loom into shot wearing weird home-made gas masks with bright red tubing. In one bravura moment, Mabuse apparently writes directly onto the camera lens, until a shot from another angle reveals he's at his desk, the camera having occupied the position of the writing paper!

A few more mad conceits like this and the film would be a delight. As it is, the cheapness of the venture doesn't allow for quite enough technical outrageousness, with too many scenes of men sitting behind desks earnestly doling out exposition. It's also quite noticeable that Mabuse (Jack Taylor) and his sidekick Hermann (Friedrich Joloff) spend the whole film stuck in the same room. Mabuse, of course, traditionally avoided 'field-work' in his prior cinematic outings, always either employing, coercing or telepathically controlling others to do his dirty work; nevertheless, he could do with a bit more room at home if we're to avoid the unflattering assumption that the legendary supervillain has fallen on hard times! Haste is evident during a scene towards the end of the film, as a car pulls up beside Mabuse's lighthouse; the shadow of a crane-mounted camera can be seen looming into shot for several seconds (although considering that Franco was such a quickfire filmmaker, moments like this are actually quite infrequent in his work). The low budget nature of the production, and the speed with which it was made, are further exacerbated by incredibly chaotic storytelling: even viewed sympathetically this is a very disjointed experience.

The original title is sometimes listed in German sources as *Der Mann, der sich Mabuse nannte*, which translates as 'The Man who called himself Mabuse'. As David Kalat has commented, in his book *The Strange Case of Dr. Mabuse*<sup>1</sup>, this suggests that Artur Brauner, who co-wrote and produced the film, was trying to put some distance between the Mabuse films of the classic era and this rather less prestigious production. In fact *Der Mann, der sich Mabuse nannte* was simply a working title; the film was released in Germany as *Dr. M schlägt zu* ('Dr. M Strikes Back') which is of course another effacement of the Mabuse name. Worse still, a







voice-over refers to the villain by the less-than-respectful sobriquet 'Doctor Cranko'! (He goes unnamed for the remainder of the film, with his lackeys referring to him simply as 'Doctor'). Only in the Spanish cut, *La venganza del doctor Mabuse*, does the supervillain's name survive intact in the title, and even then he operates under the alias of Professor Farkas in the story. In fact the question of names is a vexed one throughout. Jennifer, an eyewitness to Mabuse's crimes, gives her name as Paganini, but only after some prevarication: 'Paganini' is her husband's name (although they're not really married); her father's name was 'Herring' (but he's not her real father, she just uses the name occasionally!). Then there's the vagrant, another witness, who explains that he has swapped names with his dog. The dog is now called Carlos while he has taken the name Sultan! As the film is about a shadowy supervillain with a penchant for masks and pseudonyms (Mabuse can change identity, as seen in the two Lang films; he's sent to an asylum in the first, only for a new Mabuse to appear in the second), perhaps this fiddling about with names was meant to be significant? If so the notion is only superficially explored (for instance, neither Jennifer nor the vagrant turn out to be playing a double game or leading a double life). I suspect it was an idea that Franco simply didn't have the time or the artistic motivation to follow up once the film went into production; it feels like the sort of thing a writer might seed into a screenplay with a view to developing it later, except here the development never happens, a casualty of Franco's accelerating schedules and abhorrence for rewrites.

The haste of production results in some glaring continuity errors, especially with regard to the passage of time. When Leslie and Andros abduct Helen, the action switches from night to day and back to night, and time is similarly chaotic during the scene in which Sheriff Thomas and Malou pursue Leslie after she leaves the Red Garter Club with Jennifer. The geography's a mess too. In the Spanish version, *La venganza del Doctor Mabuse*, the plot relies on a constant shuttling back and forth of people and materials between, supposedly, Fresno in California and Tampa in Florida, a distance of over 2600 miles! Evidently we're dealing with Jess Franco's America, which bears no relation to any map you may care to peruse (see also Franco's Middle Europe in films like *The Awful Dr. Orloff* and *The Diabolical Dr. Z*). In the generally more sensible German variant, *Dr M schlägt zu*, the story is set somewhere near the border with Mexico (which at least looks plausible, given the scrubby coastal locations and 'Paella Western' police station). Speaking of police, the investigation by Sheriff Thomas and his assistant Malou is a joke, although it's hard to say which is the more decisive influence in their failure; the ineptitude and laziness of the characters, or Franco's undisciplined writing. Certainly Franco intends them to look like fools; their clapped out car breaks down during a chase, allowing the villains to abduct a key witness. During the final scenes it's Jennifer's boyfriend John and the vagrant Sultan (two minor characters) who drive to Mabuse's lighthouse and rescue her. Malou and Sheriff Thomas arrive

afterwards, without fanfare, and their sole contribution is to shoot dead the only surviving conspirator, Andros, who was actually carrying Wanda Orloff to safety! Lax scripting compounds the lack of dynamism in the investigation: the scenes at the police station are a waste of time, and far too long: Jennifer flirts tiresomely while offering her eyewitness account of Helen's abduction, and the vagrant takes an age to give his account of spying on the lighthouse and finding a pair of panties in the water nearby.

All of which logical inconsistency, corner-cutting and lousy pacing makes the storyline, to be honest, something of a pig's dinner. But while *La venganza del doctor Mabuse* was the final film to bear the Mabuse name, it would be a mistake to suggest that it was responsible for killing a long-running franchise; it belongs instead to a different category, being, like Claude Chabrol's *Dr. M* (1989), more of a tribute-cum-pastiche than the bitter end of an ongoing cycle. Coherence and thematic unity are nowhere to be found, and God alone knows what Fritz Lang would have made of it, but who cares: the best thing to do is to enjoy this erratic quasi-psychedelic film for its visual pleasures alone.

**Franco on screen:** Franco appears twice in the film, once in a speaking role as Williams's cigar-chomping boss, Crosby, and then again as a patron of the Red Garter nightclub, with his hands cupped in front of his face to conceal his identity!

**Cast and crew:** In a very odd casting choice, the sinister Dr. Mabuse is played by a ginger-bearded Jack Taylor, looking, if truth be told, less like a scary supervillain and more like a sleazy gym instructor. Fred Williams is the rakishly handsome but essentially hopeless policeman, wearing a cheap straw cowboy hat and interrogating witnesses in what looks like a Spaghetti Western Sheriff's office. Brain-damaged hulk Andros is portrayed by Portuguese ex-wrestler Jack Rocha (Moisés Augusto Rocha), who'd already appeared (uncredited) for Franco as a hospital orderly in *Count Dracula*, and played heavies in *The Devil Came from Akasava* and *El muerto hace las maletas*. His last credited screen role was the monster in *The Devil's Kiss*, an amusing Grade-Z Spanish horror by Jordi Gigó ... As for the female cast, they're certainly glamorous, though the film is relatively chaste when it comes to nudity. The first victim is played by Linda Hastreiter, who turns up again as a mysterious blind girl in *A Virgin among the Living Dead*. Ewa Strömberg, in the last of her five appearances for Franco, plays the ditsy flirtatious Jennifer ("I'm a panther! I'm a tiger! I'm a loving cat!"). Less well served, however, is the beautiful Eva Garden as Wanda Orloff, whose role is ill-conceived and poorly developed. Rounding off the female cast is the compelling Beni Cardoso as Leslie, a hard-faced dominatrix who keeps Andros in line with a whip.

**Music:** *La venganza del doctor Mabuse* boasts a marvellous jazz score, veering between cool Coltrane-influenced numbers, crazed big band riffing, and out-there avant-garde pointillism, the latter especially well executed during the scene in which Andros throttles Hermann. One particularly exciting riff is borrowed from *El muerto hace las maletas*. The Spanish version credits Franco under his

'David Khune' pseudonym, while the German version names Rolf Kühn (a regular composer for German TV in the 1970s).

**Locations:** Carlos Aguilar<sup>2</sup> reports that the film was shot on location in Spain between La Manga del Mar Menor and Alicante, including scenes filmed at the Hotel Entremares in La Manga.

**Connections:** The iconic super-villain Dr. Mabuse was created by Luxembourgian novelist Norbert Jacques and immortalised in the cinema by Fritz Lang in *Dr. Mabuse the Gambler* (1922) and *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* (1933). By the time of Franco's contribution, Mabuse had enjoyed a run of eight film appearances, six of which were made under the auspices of producer Artur Brauner: *The 1,000 Eyes of Dr. Mabuse* (1960, directed by Fritz Lang), *The Return of Dr. Mabuse* (1961), *The Terror of Doctor Mabuse* (1962), *The Invisible Dr. Mabuse* (1962), *Dr. Mabuse vs. Scotland Yard* (1963), and *The Death Ray Mirror of Dr. Mabuse* (1964). The latter of these attempted to hitch Mabuse to the coat-tails of James Bond, and found little favour either critically or commercially; consequently Brauner left the franchise fallow for seven years before his newest directorial associate, Jess Franco, expressed an interest ... Despite being nominally a Mabuse film, Franco cheekily incorporates numerous echoes of *The Awful Dr. Orloff*. To name but six: 1). There's a scientist called – you guessed it – Professor Orloff, though he's a benign fellow in contrast to his forebears. 2). A female witness watching from her bedroom window sees an unconscious woman carried off by a hulking monster-man, as in *Orloff's* first murder scene. 3). The same witness describes what she saw to the police while gossiping and flirting incorrigibly. 4). The scene in which Leslie takes Jennifer back to an empty house, where Andros captures and overpowers her, re-stages the seduction, capture and molestation of the second victim in *Orloff*. 5). A vagrant fishing in the river catches an important object that leads to the killer (in *Gritos* it's a necklace, here a pair of girls' panties). 6). Andros, Mabuse's zombie-like slave, echoes the similarly enslaved Andros in *Dr. Orloff's Monster*, whilst his play-dough facial deformity links him to Morpho in *The Awful Dr. Orloff* ... Dr. Mabuse's mission is to create "An army of beings without will power who will obey me! And when I accomplish this I'll destroy the old civilization and create a new one!" This revisits a story idea that had already sustained *Attack of the Robots* and *Kiss Me Monster*, and looks forward to *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein* (1972).

**Other versions:** To really get to grips with this film we must compare the Spanish and German video releases. They are substantially different from one another, with alterations running the gamut from dialogue changes to new scenes and complex re-sequencing. In both films the opening credits are set to the image of waves breaking on a rocky shore, after which the stories immediately diverge. *La venganza del Doctor Mabuse* begins with the transportation and subsequent theft of the McDowell Institute's radioactive moon-rocks. *Dr. M schlägt zu*, on the other hand, begins with the abduction of an unnamed young woman ('Helen' in the Spanish version) who is grilled for inside information about the

Institute prior to the robbery (in this case, of secret plans). The interrogation scene turns up later in *Venganza*, some time after the robbery has taken place, and is redubbed to make the victim simply a guinea pig for Mabuse's mind-control experiments ... Certain scenes in the Spanish cut have clearly been trimmed for sex and violence, such as the sequence in which Andros disposes of Helen. This is much longer in the German cut: she runs away but Andros catches and strangles her, dragging her corpse onto a rowing boat to be disposed of at sea. Jennifer's strip-tease at the Red Garter Club is also truncated, to remove some lingering topless shots ... The greatest divergence occurs during the attack on the McDowell Institute, which in *Dr. M schlägt zu* is far more exciting and elaborate, running seven minutes compared to the Spanish version's two-and-a-half (see 'Production Notes'). However, *Dr. M* has its problems too, in particular a fifty-second sequence of Jennifer being escorted to a cell, in which Andros drools over her before being driven back by Leslie's whip. In *Venganza* the scene occurs logically in its proper sequence, immediately after Jennifer's abduction; in *Dr. M* it follows the hypnotised Jennifer's mission to obtain secrets from Professor Parkinson, creating a glaring continuity error because she's wearing a completely different outfit.

Passing over some of the more common or garden plot contrivances (e.g. the niece of Professor Orloff is also the Sheriff's girlfriend), what on Earth is going on with the moon-rocks Mabuse is so keen to obtain? They get quite a build-up in *La venganza*, as Mabuse gloats to his sidekick Hermann: "I've discovered a radioactive metalloid in them. If treated in ray form, it could give our research sensational results. Its inter-magnetic power is such that a person subjected to its projection is controllable at a distance, and they will blindly obey whatever orders they receive." Very impressive: why, then, do we never see them? If we're going to run with an idea like this, which frankly feels like it's wandered in from an Ed Wood film, we should at least see the mysterious minerals, preferably glinting and shining with alien radiation. Instead, they're lugged into Mabuse's base in a metal container which is never opened! The German version can't get it right either, replacing the moon-rock idea with a kerfuffle over encrypted plans for a new kind of missile, which is less silly but a whole lot duller. As for *Venganza's* wackiest idea, hypnotism by proxy ("long distance magnetic manipulative force ... transmitted through a third person acting under the influence of the hypnotist"), this is also abandoned by the sensible German version, with Cranko instead telling the hypnotised Jennifer, "Meet Parkinson at the Palace Hotel and get everything about Orloff's project from him ... I'll be there as well to keep an eye on you." This means that the shots of Mabuse/Cranko's face when Jennifer hypnotises Parkinson no longer represent his long-distance psychic influence: instead, they indicate that he's actually present in the room. There's a sly substitution here; in *Venganza* Jennifer accosts Parkinson at the high-security McDowell Institute, while in *Dr. M* the same interior is now 'the Palace Hotel', circumventing any awkward questions about how the villain can gain entrance. Yet

this alteration simply replaces one absurdity with another: why risk going to the hotel simply to watch Jennifer and Parkinson? The loss of *Venganza*'s 'long distance magnetic manipulative force' also makes it difficult to explain how the laboratory-bound Cranko can 'see' what his minions are doing when they hijack the McDowell security van.

Essentially, *Dr. M schlägt zu*, with its improved (though still imperfect) internal logic, can be seen in a question-and-answer relationship to *La venganza del doctor Mabuse*...

\*Question: In *Venganza*, How does Mabuse/Cranko find out that Jennifer has been to the police, and how does he know that she witnessed Helen's abduction?

Answer: Because in *Dr. M* it's mentioned that the Sheriff's superior, Crosby, was passing information to the villains. (Cranko says to Hermann, "We don't need the sheriff's chief anymore [...] He knows too much about us and that's why you must kill him!"')

\*Question: In *Venganza*, why does Sheriff Thomas stake out the Red Garter Club? How can he know Mabuse will try to abduct Jennifer?

Answer: In *Dr. M*, When criticised by Crosby for his lack of progress, the Sheriff says, "The only thing I can do is question the dancer one more time."

\*Question: In *Venganza*, how does Mabuse eavesdrop on Professor Orloff, Professor Parkinson, and the FBI at the Institute?

Answer: In *Dr. M* it's mentioned that Hermann is a master blackmailer who has bugged Orloff's house and the Institute's offices, although we have to take this on trust given that we never see Hermann blackmailing anyone, or planting any bugs.

\*Question: In *Venganza*, after Leslie abducts Wanda, a detective calls Sheriff Thomas to say, "Her tire tracks led us to very dangerous terrain near the coast, and that's where the tracks completely disappear." How on Earth can he follow tire tracks over long distances by road?

Answer: Sorry, I haven't a clue!

So which version came first? *Dr. M schlägt zu* was certainly released first; it opened in Berlin in December 1972. Bearing in mind the recollections of Artur Brauner, it seems likely that Franco's cut, deemed incoherent by the producer, was released only in Spain, in November 1974. (It remains possible, however, that neither version represents Franco's original. The Spanish video of *Venganza* runs a paltry 64m, the German *Dr. M* just over 75m. Both fall well short of the alleged Spanish theatrical running time of 97m!)

**Problematica:** Wolfgang Kieling is credited on Spanish prints (as 'W. Kieling') however he doesn't appear in any available prints. Oddly, his credit is missing from German prints.

**Press coverage:** *ABC Andalucía* were distinctly unimpressed: "Despite the striking subject, this is not a good version of the myth. Franco has succeeded in delivering a vulgar vision, with nothing original. The performances cannot be considered good, but rather the opposite. The choice of scenarios is inconsistent and rather insubstantial. Technically the film achieves nothing new. It constantly uses scenes of static characters and unattractive close-ups. In summary, a film that offers no guarantee of entertainment because of the poor treatment of the subject."<sup>3</sup>

## JUNGFRAUEN-REPORT

*Virgins Report*

West Germany 1971

*Alternative titles*

**Les Vierges et l'Amour** (BEL/French poster) *Virgins and Love*

**De Maagden en de Liefde** (BEL/Dutch poster) *Virgins and Love*

**Defloration** (shooting title [OB/MF])

*Production companies*

**Tele-cine Film-und Fernsehproduktion** (Berlin)

**Cinerama Filmgesellschaft mbH** (Munich)

© 1972. Tele-Cine, Berlin [GER prints]

*Theatrical distributors*

**Cinerama Filmgesellschaft mbH** (Munich)

*Timeline*

Shooting date (1st shoot)	28 May to 12 July	1971
Shooting date (2nd shoot)	22 to 27 November	1971
Classified (GER)	18 April	1972
Germany premiere	28 April	1972
Belgium (Brussels)	05 October	1972

*Theatrical running time*

West Germany 78m

**Cast:** **Hans Hass Jr.** (Adam/student's boyfriend [*two roles*]). **Eva Garden** (Anna). **Ingrid [Ingeborg] Steinbach** (bride-to-be). **Diane Winter**. **Howard Vernon** (medieval de-flowerer/Anna's father/inquisitor [*three roles*]). **Herbert Weissbach** (lord of the manor). **Cristine von Blanc** [as 'Christine Werner'] (Eve/student/virgin being tested [*three roles*]). **Robert Costor**. **Friedrich Quandt**. *uncredited:* **Linda Hastreiter** (inquisitor's helper/squaw/woman in hammock [*three roles*]). **Britt Nichols** (virgin with dildo). **Vítor Mendes** (kidnapped girl's father/Heinrich Zimmermann, bride-to-be's father [*two roles*]). **Rosita Palomares** [as 'Rosa Palomares'] (foreskin biter). **Antonio de Cabo** ('Cambodian' priest). **Hubert Frank** (interviewee in dark glasses).

**Credits:** director: **Jess Franco**. documentation & screenplay: **Paul Alexander**; from a story-idea by **Artur Brauner** [as 'Art Bernd']. director of photography: **José Climent**. editor: **Renate Engelmann**. music: **Daniel White**, **Rolf Bauer**. title music: **Rolf Bauer**. executive producer: **Karl-Heinz Mannchen**. production manager: **Maria Theresa [Teresa] Kardel**. location manager: **Ruth Keller**. costumes: **Nicole Franco [Guettard]**. sound: **Max Galinsky**. *uncredited:* producer: **Artur Brauner**. director of street sequences: **Hubert Frank**.



**Synopsis:** *A poetically structured study of virginity, and its symbolic and cultural importance through history and the world today, from Paradise to modern Germany, from Cambodia to Central America, from ancient India to Medieval Europe...*

**Production notes:** One of the weirdest films Franco churned out in the early 1970s, *Jungfrauen-Report* is his not-very-faithful contribution to the 'Report' series of German erotic pseudo-documentaries. Purporting to be *vox populi* studies of sexual mores around the world, the 'Report' films centred almost exclusively on the sexual habits of the young and beautiful ('Hot Pensioner Report' or 'Middle-Aged Chubby Report' conspicuously failed to appear...). The films decorate softcore clinches with a patina of Germanic record-keeping, as straightlaced but prurient middle-aged male interviewers try to, as it were, get their heads around promiscuous youth culture. Shooting took place from 28 May 1971 to 12 July 1971, with further footage added in November 1971. Location work was allegedly gathered from flying visits to the Azores, Madeira, Portugal, Morocco, Turkey and Brazil (the whole thing took just 38 shooting days in all).

**Review:** Considering that this is Jess Franco's contribution to the artistically unambitious *Schoolgirl Report* series, *Virgin Report* is a surprisingly complicated little number, far more eventful and amusing than one might have supposed. The material zips back and forth, from 'historical recreations' to vox pop interviews to dramatisations of the love lives of modern girls. The connective tissue may be thin, and the jump-cuts between subjects arbitrary, but Franco lends droll wit and manic energy to the project. Where one might have expected a lackadaisical effort, *Jungfrauen-Report* is actually a light-footed cod-anthropological frolic around the subject of virginity, East and West, past and present.

A nude couple run through the rhododendrons and magnolias of a beautiful garden, while a voice-over describes the ancient veneration of virginity and explains the etymological roots of the word 'defloration'. This segues into heavily processed black and white footage purporting to show the birth of phallic worship in tribal cultures. But while the voice-over intones 'anthropological' insights we're given no idea which tribal culture is being described, nor at what point in time. A history lesson with the names and dates removed; *very* Jess Franco. A treatise follows on the development of ascetism in Eastern religions, illustrated by two hilarious pseudo-swamis dangling their nether regions in an ants' nest, although this too avoids direct reference to a country, a period, or a specific religious group. It's only when we arrive at Western culture that specifics begin to arise, as Franco subjects Christianity to a variety of sardonic criticisms. There's discussion of the Christian tendency to view sex as a metonym for sin ("*The tree of knowledge was reduced to its sexual fruits*"), and a comic parody of a wedding convened in a hurry after an appalled father finds his daughter caressing her breasts in a mirror. A wedding

night provides another satirical vignette, as the grievously repressed husband can barely bring himself to look at the nude body of the woman he's just married. We see various attempts to 'restore' virginity, that is, to fake it with bloody sponges inserted in the vagina to simulate a torn hymen, and the witch trials of the Middle Ages are envisaged, with Howard Vernon torturing women whilst demanding to know what they've done with their menstrual and/or defloration blood (powerful active ingredients in black magic). You have to hand it to Franco, he really made an effort; such glimpses of the torture chamber are surprisingly elaborate for a casual project like this.

Just over twenty minutes into the film we return, via more vox pop interviews, to the present day. What follows is the only sustained patch of narrative, as a young man called George and his new girlfriend Christina stop off at his apartment for a daytime tryst. All does not go well; the inexperienced lad can't get it up, and Christina returns home frustrated. Finding herself locked out of her parents' house, she accepts a neighbour's gentlemanly offer to come in and wait. Of course it's not long before the older man has seduced her into ecstatic sex. This is much closer in style to the other *Schoolgirl Report* films, with its modern-day setting and 'slice of life' pretensions. It also illustrates the age-old hypocrisy that while virginity is celebrated in girls, experience is conveniently preferred in men. The film then cuts to more vox pop interviews, followed by further historical vignettes: a Roman woman forced to marry the man who raped her, a Native American woman deflowering herself on the stump of a severed tree branch, and an Amazonian tribeswoman circumcising a young man with her metal teeth! The anthropological and historical validity of all this is dubious, but as a ragbag of jokes, mad ideas and sexy imagery it's knowingly absurd and weird enough to hold your attention. Judiciously short at around 77 minutes in its longest version, it should amuse anyone with a taste for seventies sexploitation.

**Cast and crew:** Ingeborg Steinbach plays a blonde bride-to-be in the medieval segment who's made to sleep with her elderly priest. Steinbach stuck around for Franco's next film *Sexy Darlings* (as did Herbert Weissbach, who plays the priest; he's the pharmacist in *Sexy Darlings*) ... Hans Hass Jr., the German pop star who appeared *The Bloody Judge* and *X312 - Flight to Hell*, lets it all hang out as 'Adam' in the 'Garden of Eden' segment, and pops up again for the final discotheque scene ... Eva Garden, fresh from *El muerto hace las maletas* and *La venganza del doctor Mabuse*, plays Anna, a breast-fondling young lovely forced into a hasty marriage ... *Jungfrauen-Report* marks the first time we see the rotund visage of Vitor Mendes, a Portuguese actor who would go on to play many a butterball rogue in Franco's films of the 1970s ... Fans of Franco's *A Virgin among the Living Dead* should keep their eyes peeled during *Jungfrauen-Report*: the two films are like 'sisters'. Both focus on virginity – satirically in *Jungfrauen-Report* and poetically in *A Virgin among the Living Dead*. They also share numerous cast members: there's a full-frontal appearance

from Christina von Blanc; Britt Nichols makes a brief cameo as a virgin deflowering herself on a silver dildo (the dildo will return too, sprayed black for its next appearance); Linda Hastreiter is the Native American woman impaling her vagina on a broken tree branch; Rosa Palomares is the orthodontal circumcision practitioner; the unknown Portuguese actor who sits outside the abandoned chapel in *Virgin among the Living Dead* plays Ingeborg Steinbach's father; and the actor who plays the lecherous old doctor in that film is a lecherous old monk here.

**Music:** Unremarkable orchestral mulch from MOR composer and German TV mainstay Rolf Bauer. A speeded up piano plays *The William Tell Overture* over a marital sex scene, in a comedic echo of the recently released *A Clockwork Orange*, which opened in West Germany on 23 March 1972. *Jungfrauen-Report* opened on 28 April 1972, leaving just enough time for Franco (or more likely a German dubbing supervisor) to slip in this little 'homage'.

**Locations:** Many sequences were shot in Sintra, Portugal, and for the first time in Franco's cinema we see the Palace of Montserrat, here used as the abode of a Cambodian prince. The vox pop interviews about virginity were conducted at various locations in Berlin, including Joachimstaler Strasse near Bahnhof Zoo station.

**Connections:** *Virgin Report* is one of a plethora of softcore sex films bankrolled in the wake of the hugely successful *Schulmädchen-Report: Was Eltern nicht für möglich halten* aka *Schoolgirl Report* (1970), directed by Ernst Hofbauer and produced by Wolf Hartwig's Rapid Film (Hartwig and Rapid would subsequently bankroll three Jess Franco movies in the early 1980s; *Sadomania*, *Bloody Moon* and *Linda*). The usual format was a medley of faux interviews with 'teenage' girls (who generally looked closer to twenty-five than sixteen), interspersed with interviews on the streets, in which people were asked for their thoughts on the permissive society, teenage hedonism, sex in the modern world, etc. Why all the documentary window dressing? Well, it's one of the oldest tricks in the book, dating back to the heyday of American exploitation: one hand wags a finger of moral and social concern, while the other hand reaches under your dirty raincoat to unzip your trousers. No one involved in making the film gives a fig about the 'issues'; the crocodile pangs of conscience are purely for the benefit of the censor. The first *Schulmädchen-Report* grossed so much money that a series of identikit sequels followed, directed either by Hofbauer or his associate Walter Boos. The last film to bear the *Schulmädchen-Report* brand name was Part 13 (!) made in 1980 with Katia Bienert, the young star of Franco's *Eugenie (Historia de una perversión)* ... Like some time-travelling greatest hits collection, *Virgin Report* gathers footage from the sets of roughly contemporary Franco films like *Sexy Darlings* and *A Virgin among the Living Dead*, but also peeks back to previous successes (the heavily trimmed medieval material looks like out-takes from *The Bloody Judge*) and forward to films not yet begun - the skit with the Amazon women looks forward to 1973's *Maciste* films, while the African tribal rites anticipate *Devil Hunter*

... A word from Nitpickers Corner: when the otherwise info-lite voice-over mentions a specific historical source ("Gestriegelte Rockenphilosophie, published in 1709, predicts a life of bad luck for the man who meets a pure virgin in the morning") it falls into error. First published in 1705 by the apothecary Johann Georg Schmidt, the book in question was quoted by James George Frazer in his massively influential tome *The Golden Bough* (1890), but it turns out that he mistranslated the title as "The Striped Petticoat Philosophy" when a more accurate translation would be 'Old Wives' Tales Pilloried'. The point is significant: Schmidt's original text is a rigorous *debunking* of superstitions, not a compendium of folk wisdom ... The black-and-white segment dealing with phallic worship in ancient times is shot on overexposed high contrast stock: one wonders whether Franco was emulating the style of Pere Portabella's *Cuedecuc Vampir*, which had been shot on the set of his own *Count Dracula* the year before.

**Other versions:** There are two versions of the film currently available, running 67 minutes and 77 minutes. The differences affect four scenes. In the longer version, the sequence in which Maria is caught fondling herself by her father continues for an additional 3m45s: we see her discuss marriage with her mother, followed by a shot of the father indulging in adultery and then praying in the marital bed, and finally we see the father setting up his daughter with a suitor - her amorous piano teacher. The longer cut also makes the process of getting the girl to the altar more protracted, thus reducing the comic speed of the 'shot-gun wedding'. The Roman abduction scene is fifty seconds longer, and there's an additional five and a half minutes pertaining to sexual rites in tribal African culture, including a great deal more stock footage. Finally, the climactic clinch between Christine von Blanc and Hans Hass Jr., is two and a half minutes longer, with additional dialogue underlining the romantic mood ... However, this is still not the whole story. In April 1972 the German board of film certification (FSK) asked for major cuts, the content of which has not yet surfaced elsewhere. During the medieval torture sequence showing naked virgins strapped on a rack, the following images were removed: a). the squeezing of nipples with a pair of pliers. b). the cutting of a bloodline on the naked body of a girl. c). the image of an iron plier pressed around the mutilated body of a girl. d). a medium close-up of female bodies with mutilated nipples. Furthermore, in the 'present day seduction' episode, two shots were removed in which the older man fondles the girl's pubic area during intercourse. In the Cambodian sequence, a close-up of a girl's vagina was removed before the priest penetrates her with his long sharp fingernail; during the defloration of the white girl by the black chief, a shot of the girl's vagina seen between the man's thighs was removed; and in the episode with the priest and the virgin, shots were removed in which she's seen performing fellatio under the blanket, while the following images of her touching the man's genitals were shortened. (My thanks to Guiskard Oberparleiter for these mouth-watering details.)

## SEXY DARLINGS

(UK theatrical title)

### West Germany & France 1971

French visa number: 39705

*Original theatrical title in country of origin*

**Robinson und seine wilden Sklavinnen** (GER)

*Robinson and his Wild Slaves*

**Trois filles nues sur l'île de Robinson** (FR)

*Three Naked Girls on Robinson's Island*

*Alternative titles*

**3 filles nues dans l'île de Robinson** (FR theatrical poster)

**L'isola dei piaceri proibiti** (IT theatrical)

*Island of Forbidden Pleasures*

**Les aventures "eroticomiques" de Robinson**

(BEL French language theatrical)

**De "erotikomische" avonturen van Robinson**

(BEL Dutch language alt. theatrical)

**Trois filles érotiques** (FR alt. title [MF]) *Three Sexy Girls*

**L'île des femmes nues** (FR video cover) *Island of Naked Women*

**Robinson Crusoe und seine wilden Sklavinnen**

(GER shooting title) *Robinson Crusoe and his Wild Slaves*

**Robinson 71** (FR shooting title [MF])

**Trois vicieuses sur une île**

(shooting title [OB/MF]) *Three Depraved Women on an Island*

**Trois filles nues a tout faire**

(FR alt. [CNC]) *3 Naked Girls Do Everything*

*Unconfirmed title*

**L'île des plaisirs défendus** (BEL-French lang alt. theatrical

[MF]) *The Island of Forbidden Pleasures* (Note: there is a 1977 Brazilian film called *A Ilha dos Prazeres Proibidos*, directed by Carlos Reichenbach, with this alternative title.)

*Production companies*

**Tele-Cine Film-und Fernsehproduktion** (Berlin)

**Comptoir Français du Film Production** (Paris)

© 1972. Tele-Cine, Berlin [GER prints]

*Theatrical distributors*

**Pilot Filmverleih** (Hamburg)

**Comptoir Français du Film Production** (Paris)

*Timeline*

Shooting date	20 August to 15 October	1971
France (CNC)	25 July	1972
Paris (Filmportal.de)	11 October	1972
French visa issued	11 January	1973

Italy (San Remo)	11 July	1973
UK 'X' certificate issued	14 August	1973
Rome	15 October	1974
Classified (GER)	24 May	1978
Germany	26 May	1978

*Theatrical running time*

West Germany	81m
France	85m
German X-rated Kult DVD running time	76m
UK	81m

*Cast:* **Yuda [Yehuda] Barkan** (Robinson Schmidt). **Andrea Rau** (Robinson's dream girl/Linda, an actress [*two roles*]). **Anne Libert** (Samantha). **Ingeborg Steinbach** (Pepper). **Herbert Weissbach** (pharmacist). **Linda Hastreiter** (blonde customer in pharmacy). **Paul Müller** (petroleum company boss). **Max Nosseck** (elderly pharmacy customer). **Howard Vernon** (camera assistant/man in porno film/tribal chief [*three roles*]). **Ruth Gassmann** (Angelika Schmidt). *uncredited:* **Gustavo Re** (Count Laszius). **Karl-Heinz Mannchen** (Interpol inspector). **Irene D'Astrea** (Robinson's mother-in-law). **Jess Franco** (film director). **Isidro Novellas** (petroleum company board member).

*Credits:* director: **Jess Franco**. story & screenplay: **Artur Brauner** [as 'Art Bernd'] [GER prints] / screenplay & technical script: **Ken Globus & Jess Franco** [FR prints]. dialogue: **Reinhold Brandes**. director of photography: **Gérard Brissaud** [GER prints] / **José Climent** [FR prints]. editor: **Josiane Pierrette Belair** [as 'P. Belair']. music: **Daniel White**. additional music: **Bruno Nicolai**. executive producer: **Karl-Heinz Mannchen**. production manager: **Karl-Heinz Mannchen** [FR prints]. location manager: **Ruth Keller**. assistant director: **Maria Teresa Kardel** [as 'Marie Kardell']. camera operator: **Alberto Prous**. make-up: **Elisenda Villaneuva**. music publisher: **Sermi** (Rome). song 'Like Robinson Crusoe' sung by **Margaret Russell**. *uncredited:* German producer: **Artur Brauner**. French producer: **Robert de Nesle**.

*Synopsis:* Robinson Schmidt is a chemist who lives a pathetic life of drudgery and marital discord with his shrewish wife Angelika and her battle-axe mother. By night he conducts private chemical research into a possible anti-pollution agent. During a demonstration of his new compound in front of the board of directors at a major petroleum company, he accidentally spills the compound and discovers that it acts as a powerful sedative, knocking everyone out cold. Returning home, and deciding that he's had enough of it all, he sedates his wife and mother-in-law and takes to the road. Falling head over heels for Linda, a beautiful actress he sees shooting a film in a park, Robinson poses as a waiter at a party to be near her. Linda and her friend Lucky are trying to steal jewels from the party host, Count Laszius, when the Count and his two sidekicks catch them red-handed. Robinson intervenes, drugs the Count



and his lackeys, and tells Linda he's heading to a remote island to live out his dream of being a modern-day Robinson Crusoe. She agrees to join him later. Buying a boat, Robinson sets sail and eventually finds a small tropical island. There he's befriended by Samantha and Pepper, two beautiful women who were recently shipwrecked. The three enjoy a *ménage à trois*. Linda arrives too, and after minimal friction with the other girls, she settles in. Soon Robinson is living the dream, taking it easy on a tropical island and making love with three beautiful women. However, the fantasy begins to turn sour when a belligerent native tribe causes trouble. Things look even less rosy when his wife, his mother-in-law and the head of the petroleum company turn up looking for him...

**Production notes:** Between the two *Jungfrauen-Report* shoots, Franco slotted in a lightweight sex comedy called *Robinson und seine wilden Sklavinnen*, which he filmed in Portugal between 20th August 1971 and 15th October 1971. Unremarkable in itself, the film was a harbinger of things to come; it was co-produced by a French outfit called Comptoir Français du Film Production, run from an office on the Champs-Élysées by Robert de Nesle...

**Review:** This minor sex comedy rambles along agreeably enough for forty minutes or so, but eventually comes adrift when it reaches the island paradise of its lead character's dreams, at which point the story sags and some less than enlightened chauvinistic elements predominate. It's no surprise that this was distributed in Great Britain in the 1970s (hence the title *Sexy Darlings*), because all of the clichés of British sitcom-hell are here; the nagging wife, the horrendous mother-in-law, the denigrating boss, and of course the 'hero' himself, a bumbling, ineffectual 'little man' trying to live a conventional bourgeois existence but haunted by libidinal dissatisfaction; in other words, it's as close to an episode of *George and Mildred* as Jess Franco ever got. Luckily a few droplets of Francoesque humour save it from being insufferable. Among the more bizarre comic scenes is one in which Robinson, incensed that his wife and mother-in-law have insulted his pet chimpanzee (don't ask), dresses up as a skull-faced ape-monster and chases them round the house. Then there's the tense sequence in which a terrified Robinson is goaded by his newly acquired island harem to perform a life-saving appendectomy on a tribal chieftain, despite having no surgical experience. The chieftain is played by Howard Vernon, who gaily waves goodbye to the quiet, sinister dignity of his previous roles by dressing up in a grass skirt, painting his face, and jiggling a magical totem-stick at the camera like a crotchety pensioner. Still, dignity be damned, he's clearly having a ball, making the most of his nonsense-chanting role and unselfconsciously entering into the spirit of the thing. If nothing else, *Sexy Darlings* demonstrates that Franco was extremely adept at persuading actors to take part in the most absurd farragoes purely for the fun of working with him. Many of those who've talked about shooting with Franco during the 1970s agree that it was the social pleasure of being part of his retinue that kept them coming back for more, especially on

a film like this where there's clearly little in the way of money, professional kudos or creative challenge!

During an interview in 1975<sup>1</sup>, Franco mischievously slotted this title into a list of the films he regarded as his most complex works, claiming it had more political depth than at first may appear. Precisely the sort of comment that can send Franco fans off on a fool's errand looking for subtexts and arcane meanings, it proves nothing except Franco's wicked sense of humour; if only the film itself were quite so sardonic! At a push, we could say that *Sexy Darlings* shows that escapism can only function for a while before real life demands attention once more. Robinson's tragedy is that even when he creates a fantasy paradise, he can't seem to prevent unwanted intruders from his old life arriving there. In this the film adheres fairly closely to a Freudian concept of repression. The relentless jollity, however, dispenses with psychological acuity and allows wish fulfilment to ride roughshod over characterisation: Robinson's shrewish wife agrees to live on the island as a member of his 'tribal family', her aversion to sex and her relentless nagging apparently neutralised by her husband's newfound assertiveness. Even the horrendous mother-in-law is seduced, by Howard Vernon's samba-dancing tribal chief. The message? Put your dreams into reality and assert dominance over your wife - then you'll receive the respect you've been denied in your loveless marriage. As we never learn what dreams the *wife* might have, we're left to assume that all she ever wanted was to be defined by her husband's desires, making this tissue-thin piece of nonsense one of Franco's least progressive films.

**Franco on screen:** A great little cameo for Franco here, as a bad-tempered movie director shooting a scene in which the gorgeous Andrea Rau is slapped around on camera by her 'lover'. (Howard Vernon, in addition to his role as tribal chief, stands alongside the movie camera in this scene, which gives us a glimpse of his role as stills photographer 'Mario Lippert' on many a Franco production.) I suppose if we want to send a cloud scudding across the sunny vistas of *Sexy Darlings*, we could point out that Robinson rescues his dream girl Linda from her job as an actress, which involves being yelled at by a jumped-up movie director and slapped by a vain, know-nothing actor, and spirits her off to his fantasy island where she's safe in a paradisiac world of coconuts, chimpanzees and free love. With the film being made exactly a year after the death of Soledad Miranda, how likely is it that such a notion sprang from Franco's unconscious on the wings of sadness and guilt? (Miranda was on her way to sign a new film contract with Franco and Artur Brauner when her car crashed.)

**Cast and crew:** Quite how the star of this movie, Yehuda (here 'Yuda') Barkan, became involved in a Jess Franco film is anyone's guess. With the sole exception of *Sexy Darlings* he spent his acting career working in Israel, either for director-turned-mogul Menahem Golan (with whom he shot five films in three years) or *Lemon Popsicle* director Boaz Davison (for whom he starred in four, beginning with *Charlie V'hetzi* in 1974). Barkan moved

into the director's seat in the 1980s, becoming Israel's answer to Allen Funt and Bob Monkhouse with two *Candid Camera*-inspired comedies, *Hayeh Ahaltah Otah* (1980) and *Ha-Meticha Ha'Gdola* (1984). His crowning glory is *Kompot Na'alyim* (1985) about a Russian emigrant recruited into the Israeli armed forces, whose violent gastric reaction to army food is put to heroic use defusing landmines ... Andrea Rau, an actress and model best known for her glamorous turn as the lesbian lover of Countess Bathory in Harry Kumel's extraordinary *Daughters of Darkness* (1971), plays Linda, Robinson's 'dream girl' who turns out to be a jewel thief ... Producer Karl-Heinz Mannchen has a small speaking role as an Interpol agent helping Angelika to trace her missing husband. **Music:** The flippant 'tropical-muzak' score gallumphing through the film is an uncharacteristically trying experience from Daniel White, who's evidently been instructed to keep the mood as cloyingly sweet as possible.

**Locations:** The chemist's shop where Robinson works, Hammonia-Apotheke, is still in business today (looking absolutely identical) at Siemersplatz 3, Hamburg. Elsewhere, we see a brief glimpse of La Torre de Cabo Roig, fifty miles south of Alicante; this converted watchtower was the home of the 'Red Lips' duo in *Sadisterotica* and *Kiss Me Monster*. Most of the rest of the film was shot on location in Portugal (probably the gardens at Sintra), although there is at least one travelling shot taken along the fisherman's marina in Lo Pagán, Spain (after Robinson buys the clapped out automobile). The shot is part of a longer take which can be seen in its entirety in *A Virgin among the Living Dead*, where it forms the opening credit sequence ... Perhaps the funniest gag in the film comes at the end, when a shot reveals that the cast, who are supposed to be on a tropical island, are actually perched on what looks suspiciously like a horticultural water feature in the middle of a public park! Which begs the question: did Robinson ever *really* leave the modern world? Or is he just a delusional mental-case who's been camping out on a municipal duck island for the past few weeks?

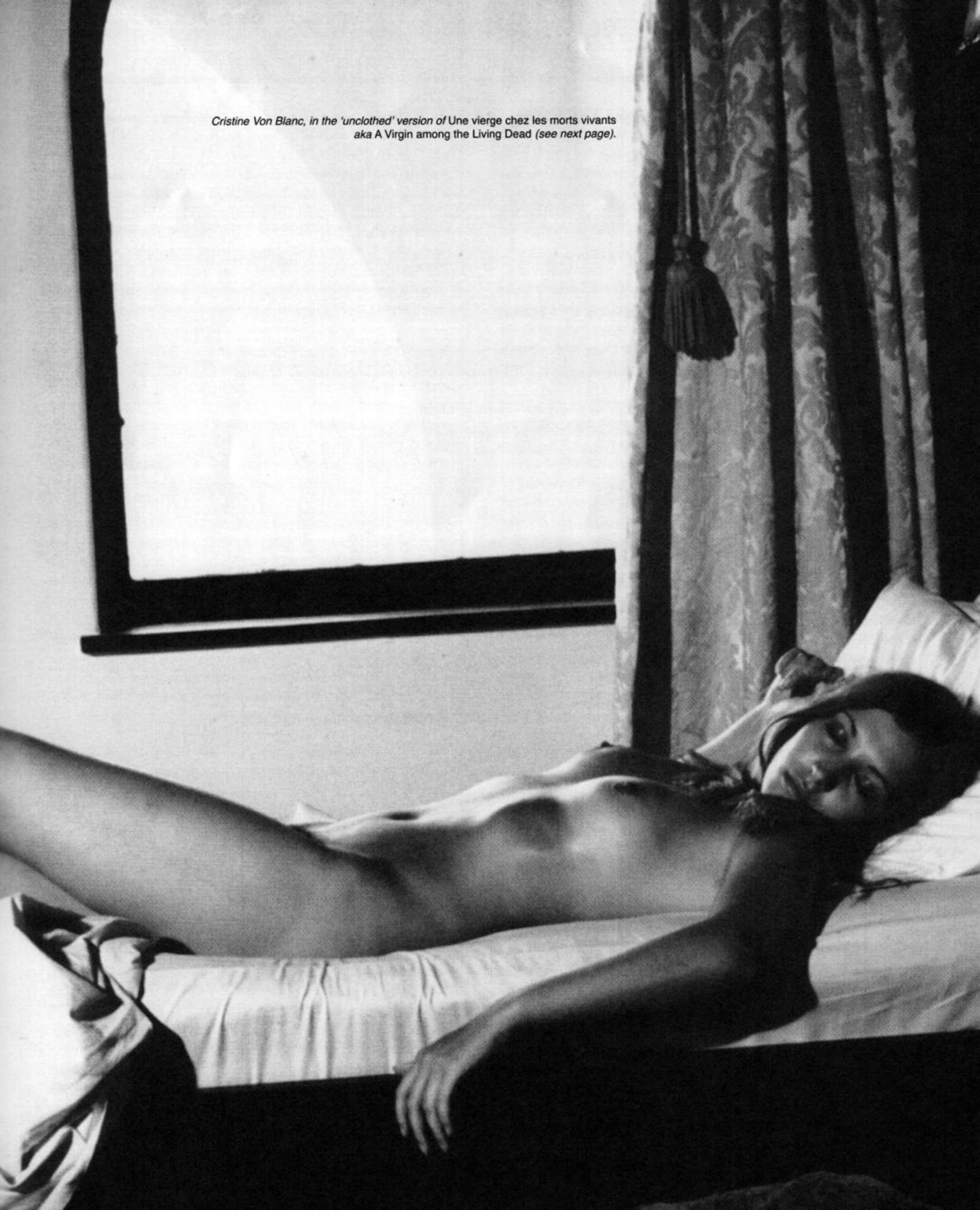
**UK release:** *Robinson und seine wilden Sklavinnen* played British sex cinemas as *Sexy Darlings*, after cuts to the 81m01s version submitted by distributor Antony Balch. An 'X' certificate was granted on the 14th August 1973 upon which the film scored bookings at the Classic, Victoria (London), and the Birmingham Jacey during 1974. See Appendix for more details.

**Connections:** The glimpses that we get of the sex film Linda and her friends watch at their 'porno party' are taken from the Middle Ages segment of Franco's *Jungfrauen-Report*, shot two months earlier in June 1971, making this the only case of two Franco films that cannot possibly exist in the same fictional universe!

**Problematica:** The following actors listed in various sources do not in fact appear: Ricardo Vázquez, Vicente Roca and Fernando Bilbao. As of 2014, the IMDb incorrectly adds Franco's wife Nicole Guettard as the 'script girl' in the onscreen film crew, and also lists the following (unconfirmed) cast member: Barbara Nielsen as 'customer in pharmacy.'



*Cristine Von Blanc, in the 'unclothed' version of Une vierge chez les morts vivants  
aka A Virgin among the Living Dead (see next page).*





## A VIRGIN AMONG THE LIVING DEAD

Liechtenstein [France, Italy & Belgium] 1971

French visa number: 41160

Italian visa number: 72529

note: there is no 'Liechtensteinian' version of the film.

### Alternative titles

**Christina Princesse de l'erotisme** (FR theatrical 1973 release)

**I desideri erotici di Christine** (IT) *Erotic Desires of Christine*

**I giochi erotici di Cristina** (IT alt. theatrical - featured in Naples press listings) *The erotic games of Cristina*

**Une vierge chez les morts vivants** (FR theatrical 1978 & 1981 re-releases) *AVirgin among the Living Dead*

Belgian theatrical title unknown.

**Los Sueños eróticos de Christina** (SP theatrical) *The Erotic Dreams of Christina*

**Christina chez les morts vivants** (FR video) *Christina among the Living Dead*

**Una vergine tra i morti viventi** (IT video) *AVirgin among the Living Dead*

**Una virgen en casa de los muertos vivientes** (SP video) *AVirgin in the House of the Living Dead*

**Virgin among the Living Dead** (US video sleeve)

**Zombi 4 A Virgin among the Living Dead** (US video)

**Gli zombi cannibali** (IT video) *The Zombie Cannibals*

**Una vergine tra gli zombi** (IT alt. video) *AVirgin among the Zombies*

**El infierno de los sentidos** (ARG video) *The Hell of the Senses*

**Testamento diabolico** (ARG video) *Diabolical Testament*

**Eine Jungfrau in den Krallen von Zombies** (GER video/GER DVD) *AVirgin in the Grip of the Zombies*

**Das Grauen von Schloss Montserrat** (GER DVD) *The Horror of Montserrat Castle*

**Virgen entre los muertos vivientes** (SP DVD)

**A Virgem e os Mortos** (POR DVD) *The Virgin and the Dead*

**La Nuit des l'étoiles filantes** (FR shooting title) *The Night of Shooting Stars*

**La Nuit où les étoiles meurent** (alt. FR shooting title [MF]) *The Night When the Stars Died*

**Zombi holocaust** (FR alt. video) (source: Christophe Bier's *Dictionnaire des Films Français Pornographiques*)

### Unconfirmed titles

**Eine Jungfrau bei den Lebenden Toten** (GER theatrical) *AVirgin among the Living Dead*

**Esorcismo per una vergine** (IT alt. theatrical) *Exorcism for a Virgin*

### Production companies

(1971) **Prodif Ets.** (Vaduz)

(1973) **Comptoir Français du Film Production** (Paris) [tbc]

(1978) **J.K. Films** (Italy)

(1978) **Prodif Ets.** (Vaduz)

(1978) **B.I.P.** [Brux International Pictures] presents (Brussels)

(1981) **Eurociné** (Paris)

### Timeline

Shooting date	Nov - December	1971
French visa issued ( <i>Une vierge...</i> )	04 April	1973
France (source: CNC)	12 July	1973
Paris (Eurociné Book/EC)	15 November	1973
Italian censor certificate	26 October	1978
Italy (Naples)	11 November	1978
Seville & Madrid	07 July	1981
Barcelona	26 July	1982

### Theatrical distributors

(1973) **Comptoir Français du Film Production** (Paris)\*

(1978) **Brux International Pictures** (Brussels)

(1978) **Eurovinci** (Rome)

(1981) **Eurociné** (Paris)

\*unconfirmed

### Theatrical running time

France version 1 - <i>Christina princesse de l'erotisme</i>	90m
Belgium <i>Une vierge chez les morts vivants</i>	80m
Spain	85m

**Cast:** **Cristine von Blanc** (Christina Bentham, aka 'Christina Reiner'). **Britt Nichols** (Carmencé, Christina's cousin). **Rosita Palomares** [as 'Rosa Palomar'] (Aunt Abigail). **Anne Libert** ('The Queen of the Night'). **Howard Vernon** (Uncle Howard). **Jess Franco** (Mr. Basilio, Uncle Howard's manservant). **Paul Müller** (Ernesto Pablo Juan Reiner, Christina's father). *uncredited:* **Nicole Guettard** (female nurse at the hotel). **Linda Hastreiter** (Linda, the blind girl). **Antonio de Cabo** (Pedro Mandervenez, the lawyer). // *Cast (Christina... 'garden orgy' footage, director Pierre Quérut):* **Alice Arno** (woman on throne). **Pierre Taylou & France Nicolas** (1st couple in garden orgy). **Wal Davis** (man of 3rd couple). **Johnny Wessler** (man of 4th couple).

**Credits:** directed by **Jess Franco**. written by **Jess Franco**. director of photography: **José Climent**. editor: **Josiane Pierrette Belair** [as 'P. Belair']. music & special sound effects: **Bruno Nicolai**. production manager: **Karl-Heinz Mannchen**. make-up: **Elisenda Villeneuve**. orchestra conducted by **Bruno Nicolai**. colour: **Eastmancolor**. laboratory: **Vittori**. music publisher: **Sermi**. *French version dialogue:* **Paul D'Ales**.

**Synopsis:** Naïve and innocent Christina Bentham arrives in Portugal, travelling alone. She's an orphan: her mother died many years ago while her distant father, Ernesto Reiner, supported her financially but never even sent a photograph. Consequently, Christina is beset by loneliness at the news from her Uncle Howard that her father has died. She has been instructed to attend the family estate at Montserrat for the reading of the will. Spending the night at a local inn, she reveals her destination to the owner who claims no one lives there. The following morning, Uncle Howard's manservant Basilio arrives to collect her. He is mute and apparently retarded. Approaching their destination by car, Christina observes that there is something disturbing about the region. On her arrival, Uncle Howard is cheerful (though ice-cold to the touch). He informs the puzzled girl that there is soon to be another death in the family; Herminia, Christina's stepmother. Herminia whispers to Christina to get out of Montserrat; then she dies. Howard's wife, Abigail, Christina's cousin Carmencé, and a silent, raven-haired woman (later referred to as 'The Queen of Darkness') are also present, each of them giving off strange 'vibrations'. While waiting for the arrival of her father's lawyer, Christina goes swimming in a lake near the property, where she is spied upon by two older men. A handsome lad from the village sends them packing and he and Christina make friends. However, he believes Montserrat Mansion is unoccupied, and haunted as well. When Christina brings him into the house, Uncle Howard appears and the young man flees in terror. The lawyer duly arrives and reveals that the entire estate has been left to Christina. Uncle Howard and the others prepare to leave, but she insists that he and the others should stay as long as they want. Christina falls into sleepy reverie, day and night, during which she receives visitations from a blind woman called Linda. Strange experiences escalate: Christina witnesses Carmencé in a sadistic sexual encounter with Linda, cutting her with a pair of scissors and drinking

her blood. After seeing Howard and Abigail playing with a severed hand at the dining table, she runs away to an outbuilding in the gardens where she is confronted by the ghost of her father. He warns her of great danger and evil at Montserrat, but it's too late; Uncle Howard and the others drag her away and force her to participate in a black magic ceremony. Is there a route out of this maze of nightmares for Christina, or is her fate inescapably entwined with these monsters?

"The reverie which works poetically maintains us in an intimate space which does not stop at any frontier - a space uniting the intimacy of our being which dreams with the intimacy of the beings which we dream. It is within these composite intimacies that a poetics of reverie is coordinated. The whole being of the world is amassed poetically around the cogito of the dreamer." - from *The Poetics of Reverie* by Gaston Bachelard

**Production notes:** During November or December 1971, in and around the Conde de Castro Guimarães Palace in Cascais, Portugal, and the nearby town of Sintra, Franco directed this haunting poetic reverie with the shooting title *La Nuit de l'étoiles filantes* ('The Night of Shooting Stars'). At the same time, he collected extra material for the part-completed *Jungfrauen-Report*, begun earlier that year for Artur Brauner's CCC subsidiary Tele-Cine Film. By the time *La Nuit de l'étoiles filantes* was offered for sale (as *Christina, Princesse de l'erotisme*) the only credited production company was Prodif Ets., allegedly based in Vaduz, Liechtenstein. (See also: *Nightmares Come at Night*; *Sex Charade*; *Eugenie*.) Franco was once again taking a leaf out of Harry Alan Towers' book, mounting the production 'from Liechtenstein' almost certainly for tax purposes. Perhaps there was another reason: was *La Nuit de l'étoiles filantes* made with 'left-over' funds from the scrappy *Jungfrauen-Report* shoot? If so, Franco never made another film with Brauner, Tele-Film, or CCC Filmkunst: perhaps it didn't go unnoticed. This is pure speculation, obviously, but it's curious to note that the first three 'Prodif Ets.' films emerge at the end of Franco's nine-film association with Harry Alan Towers, and the fourth at the end of his association with Artur Brauner...

**Review:** A morbid and magical fever dream captured on celluloid, this story of a naïve young woman who returns to the family mansion for the reading of her father's will, only to discover that her relatives are nothing but malevolent spectres, is beautiful, haunting, creepily enthralling, and totally Jess Franco.

We begin with the ocean, seen from a car driving rapidly along a seafront jetty. The shakiness of the camera, the speed of the vehicle, the hurtling velocity of the music, all conspire to create an electrifying sense of immanence. As the car travels inland through the Spanish port of Lo Pagán, we pass through sunbaked scrubland and shabby buildings at the edge of town. Via a jump cut we arrive at the shady foyer of a tiny old peasant hotel and meet Christina, the film's heroine (we're meant to assume she was a passenger in the car although we never actually saw her in it). After one of those

typically creepy exchanges with a hotelier regarding her intended destination ("Montserrat? Nobody goes there!") Christina is picked up by Basilio, a greasy little man with a slack mouth and weaselly eyes. Yes, it's the director, Jess Franco, in one of his favourite cameos, playing a retarded servant sent to fetch the heroine and draw her into a world of "soft shadows and silence".

What transpires as *A Virgin among the Living Dead* unfolds is essentially a cinematic poem; it's certainly not a narrative. The storyline would barely support a twenty-five minute *Twilight Zone* episode; the family reunion from hell that turns out to be a family reunion in hell. Instead, the pleasure of the film can be found in the emotional and atmospheric texture of the scenes, their wayward illogicality, the sensation that Franco creates of floating between fragmentary thoughts and feelings, like thoughts coalescing into nightmares, moving in a slumberous procession on the verge of sleep. To speak of what it's 'about' risks trampling the essence of the project. The closest thing to a theme here is 'family', or more precisely the absence of family. Christina returns 'home' to a house she's never seen, a 'family' she knows nothing about. She arrives at Montserrat Mansion, ostensibly to attend the reading of her father's will – but she never even knew her father. "I'm lost, totally lost" she weeps at one point, with some justification. Christina's sorrow, her loneliness, her naiveté and sense of abandonment, are the heart and soul of the film, and we can excuse her bizarre refusal to be spooked by her creepy relatives as just the desperate wish to have some kind of family, however freaky and cadaverous.

Installed as the rightful heir of Montserrat Mansion, Christina undergoes a series of nightmarish and perplexing experiences with the warped and uncanny characters she meets there. Head of the family, and chief mouthpiece for Franco's mordant wit, is 'Uncle Howard' (a masterclass of infernal elegance from Howard Vernon). When Christina expresses shock at the jaunty waltzes he plays on the piano while Cousin Herminia lies dying upstairs, he mocks her by hammering out sombre chords, smirking, "Would you rather I played a funeral march? Here's to the Devil and his pomp". With his cold skin and icier manners, he's the epitome of the sinister uncle, probably a dedicated pervert and an adept in all the major occult disciplines. Next in prominence is Cousin Carmencé, played by Britt Nichols, who smokes like a chimney but coughs with each drag, exuding the haughty disconnection of a drug-soaked aristocrat from beyond the grave. The other denizens of Montserrat include Herminia, the dying cousin who gasps "Run away!" to Christina; Aunt Abigail, an older woman from whom decadent Continental ennui seems to seep from every pore; and esoteric, raven-haired beauty Anne Libert, billed as 'The Queen of the Night' in publicity materials, who drifts about the place like a cross between Vampira and Greta Garbo.

*A Virgin among the Living Dead* incorporates familiar genre imagery – a family funeral, the reading of the will, the notion of a house populated by ghosts – but dissolves the glue that binds these common tropes together. Events and incidents supplant each other

without momentum ("Here the nights pass rather slowly – as slowly as the days" says Aunt Abigail). To be honest, once we're fifteen minutes in you could probably shuffle the deck and reorder the scenes without harming the overall effect. Franco is at his most experimental here, utterly uninterested in suspense. The trappings of the genre – severed body-parts, blood-drinking, nightmares, black masses – are cast adrift in a plotless miasma, disengaged from the explanations that would ground them. Instead the film is full of strange pauses, jarring emphases, non-sequiturs, and startling shifts in tone. When Christina eats breakfast, silently observed by her relatives, she asks, "Aren't you hungry?" Uncle Howard replies, "The truth is we're seldom hungry. Hardly ever!", at which he and the others burst out laughing; vampires enjoying a joke at her expense. Sensing an ice-breaking moment, Christina joins in, thanking everyone for their hospitality and reminiscing about her fatherless childhood. But as she begins her soliloquy, the mirth drains instantly from the others' faces. It's a subtle moment, comic but chilling – we see their lack of empathy, their disinterest in 'sharing' with the emotionally gushing Christina. Likewise, they find her innocence quite ridiculous: when a shocked Christina stumbles upon Carmencé brandishing scissors and licking gore from a wound on Abigail's breasts, Carmencé just giggles, "Come in Christina! Come on and play with us. Don't you like the taste of blood?" The oppressive mood lifts briefly as Christina swims nude in a lake festooned with water lilies, to the accompaniment of one of Bruno Nicolai's perkier tunes. This being a Franco film, however, 'normality' involves being spied upon by two middle-aged peeping toms, whose lustful facial contortions add a touch of low comedy. Luckily for Christina a handsome young man intervenes and escorts her back to Montserrat Mansion, but he runs away in terror when Uncle Howard appears on the verandah. As for the perverts, they pop up again later, with no explanation, as the solicitor who reads the will, and the doctor who tends to Christina, which simply adds to the story's feverish circularity and hermetic claustrophobia.

"I was six months old when mother died. I don't remember anything. I never met my father. He sent me to boarding school, and to a private college in London." When talking about her past, Christina adopts the quietly wounded tone of the abandoned child; where one might expect resentment, there's only sadness and a willingness to forgive, in the hope of a reunion that has been cruelly deferred. We can detect no anger in her; only the pain of being rejected, and the need for parental love. Christina's greatest desire is to have known her father, a desire the inverted fantasia of Montserrat will eventually grant her. But as the saying goes, be careful what you wish for... Surrounded by the inexplicable, Christina eventually meets him: he's dead of course, but beggars can't be choosers. He's played by Franco mainstay Paul Müller, with a hangman's rope around his neck and a psychedelic echo on his voice. "The Guardian of Night gave me a few moments on Earth, after which I shall return to the deep dark valley of Death," he tells her. Intriguingly, when Christina says,





"Father, that rope! What's been done to you?", he responds, "No less than I did to others." It would seem that he's a killer, something he shares with another of Franco's patriarchs whom Müller played just a year earlier; the murderous Albert Radeck in *Eugenie*. Ambiguity surrounding Christina's surname helps to support the idea. When first we meet her, she's greeted at the hotel as 'Miss Bentham'; "How do you know my name?" she asks the hotelier. But during the reading of the will, we hear her father's name read out by the notary as 'Ernest Pablo Juan Reiner'. Why then is she not called Christina Reiner? Perhaps Bentham was her mother's name? It's an English-sounding appellation, which would explain why she was schooled in London. The double name suggests subterfuge, masked identity, lies and concealment. So what's going on? Who is Christina really, and who is her father? Could he actually be the murderous Albert Radeck of *Eugenie*? If so, Christina is the sister of Eugenie! We could surmise that Radeck/Reiner, a criminal genius with multiple identities, sent Christina away so that he could concentrate on Eugenie, indoctrinating her in the Sadean vices. Both girls say that their mother died when they were very young. (They don't look very much like each other, so perhaps they had different mothers, both of whom Radeck slaughtered after they gave birth?) Remember that as well as murder, 'Reiner' shares Radeck's fascination with eroticism; the will refers to his "collection of carved ebony phalluses". Christina and Eugenie could be seen as sisters like Sade's Justine and Juliette: the eternal victim and the dedicated libertine. Christina has characteristics that link her very strongly to Justine; endless naïvety, a persistent inability to fight back or resist the impositions put upon her; a trusting nature beyond the bounds of good sense. Where this film differs from Sade, however, is the sorrow it conveys; emotionally-speaking it walks beside Christina, something a Sadean tale would never do. Of course, neither would Sade have any truck with the afterlife; a materialist to the core, he would regard this story of revenants and hauntings as poppycock. The film takes a Sadean tale of abused innocence and then perversely recasts it as a mystical odyssey, an attempt perhaps to broker a deal between two opposing forces of Franco's cinema: libertine sensualism and supernatural fantasy.

After telling Christina that he was murdered at Montserrat, and imploring her to escape, the damned patriarch glides soundlessly away into an inky darkness. I say 'damned', because the metaphysics of *A Virgin among the Living Dead* are built on Christian morality: "Judgement was passed; Death's henchman holds a mirror to me," says Reiner. The after-life here is built on the Christian notion of moral judgement and punishment. At the same time, the punishment suffered by Ernesto Reiner is not the eternal torture of the body, it's torment of the spirit; the agony of facing one's true self. As with *Venus in Furs*, we're dealing with the flipside of Franco's Sadean stories, with a character punished beyond death for their cruelty, and forced to confront their own guilt. (It must be guilt that Reiner feels; otherwise confrontation with the mirror would hold no fears.) This clash between the Christian concept of judgement

after death (the Semitic deity Beelzebub gets a mention), and the more existential notion of Hell as an inescapable confrontation with the self, suggests Franco at war with himself: the would-be Sadean brought up in a Catholic culture; the convivial lover of women excited by the spectacle of tortured female flesh; the tormented agnostic, tugged and pulled between amoral freedom and the terror of eternal punishment.

In a mesmerising vision that stands here as the apex of Franco's imagery, Christina walks through a wooded glade and sees her father hanging by the neck before her, the dead man receding at a fixed distance as her point-of view tracks forward. Expanding on a technique Franco used ten years earlier in *La reina del Tabarin* (Müller is standing on the camera dolly, while some sort of device out of shot keeps the rope taut), it's a vision so strange and sombre you find yourself holding your breath. Combined with Bruno Nicolai's achingly beautiful music, it summons to the screen a vision with all the haunting majesty of Cocteau's *Orphée*. But this embodiment of longing, of Christina's need for guidance and her desperation to follow her father even unto death, leads to the final calamity, as the evil ones pounce and draw her into their world. Ernesto is merely the bait. All of this sadness, all of this poetry, the spell that is cast, the breathless sense of time moving out of joint, the mesmeric confluence of music and picture, the composite of reality and fantasy embodied in the image; these are lures. One might say that they are tricks pulled on us by the evil demon of images. Seduction and beauty equate to evil. Franco's condensation of aesthetics, here, points to a world of immortal danger, where poetry and beauty lead not to wisdom or exaltation but perdition.

It's fitting that we conclude here by discussing the final scenes, for me possibly the most magical and extraordinary in Franco's career. The set up is as follows: Christina has been pulled into malediction, the victim of a black magic ceremony that ends with Basilio reaching up to twist and break the hands of a grandfather clock. The implication is clear: these events take place in a symbolic realm outside of time. We then cut to Christina apparently waking from a nightmare in the hotel we saw at the start of the film. Was it 'all a dream'? No, it's much worse; Christina's staring eyes and wordless moans suggest a complete mental breakdown. "She was found in a coma near that old castle in the valley," says the hotelier to a young doctor. We cut from Christina's wild, staring eyes to the garden at Montserrat. There we see her being kissed by Anne Libert's Queen of the Night and led by the hand into the lake where she swam so happily earlier. Fully clothed, the two women disappear beneath lily-strewn waters. On a grassy slope overlooking the lake are seven silent figures: Uncle Howard, Aunt Abigail, Basilio, Carmencé, Linda, the lawyer, and the elderly Doctor. At a silent word from Uncle Howard (undubbed in all versions) the entire group walk slowly down the grass and into the water. The scene is matchlessly eerie, and once again you find yourself holding your breath, spellbound by an air of immanence.

Despite the strangeness of the actions, everyone stands or walks with a naturalistic detachment; no silliness, no googly eyes, no 'zombies on the prowl' arm-waving. Most of the group (Antonio de Cabo; Howard Vernon; Jess Franco; Rosa Palomar) look as though they're wearing their 'real life' clothes. Britt Nichols wears a red flannel bathrobe. Only Linda Hastreiter, in a glamorous sky-blue gown, looks 'costumed'. (Note that along with Christina's relatives the solicitor and doctor walk into the water too. This leaves only the hotelier, the young doctor, the teenage boy at the lake, and the man outside the chapel, as 'real' people. Everyone else is a phantom.) It's as though we're hovering at the threshold between reality and fiction. The actors seem divested of their characters, yet still animated by an air of unreality. We're just a tiny step away from Alejandro Jodorowsky's *The Holy Mountain*, which ends with the camera zooming back to reveal the lights and crew, at the instigation of a character played by the director (who declares, "If we have not obtained immortality, then at least we have obtained reality."). The difference is that in *A Virgin among the Living Dead* there is no such primary dialectic between the filmmaker and his audience; the story is hermetic, the characters remain locked in their fantasy world. But only just. As these life-size marionettes walk into the lake (back into their creator's unconscious) it's as though the dreamer is about to awaken. We're just a bated breath away from seeing the cast step out of character, head for their cars, and wave goodbye to the camera...

You may find that *A Virgin among the Living Dead* doesn't work for you on first viewing. There are the usual infelicities of haste that beleaguer Franco's 1970s work, plenty of signs that this was made on next to nothing. Some of the dialogue is stilted and awkward, and the absence of a coherent story can be alienating for a significant number of viewers. But if you accept the film's loose, improvisational style; if you embrace the strangeness and pick up on the sly humour; if you tune yourself to Franco's alien signal, it's a film you'll find yourself revisiting time and time again...

**Franco on screen:** Basilio is one of Franco's funniest and strangest screen roles. One minute he's a virtual idiot, playing with matches and murmuring nonsense syllables; the next he's sinister, menacing, entirely aware. At one point he threatens the heroine with a severed chicken's head (!) before fingering his nose and blowing it a kiss – only to drop it in sudden boredom, like a child who's exhausted the possibilities of an improvised toy. As for the scene in which he twists the hands of an antique grandfather clock: surely this is the defining symbol of Jess Franco's cinema!

**Cast and crew:** Little is known about the film's star Cristine von Blanc; like her character in *Virgin*, her real name is uncertain. Is it Christine Betner, or Christine Werner? ... Another prominent player is Portuguese-born Britt Nichols (aka Cármen Yazalde, or Maria do Carmo Ressurreição de Deus), an actress in Lisbon operetta whose all-too-brief movie career included seven films in two years for Jess Franco, a fleeting but memorable appearance having her breasts lacerated by the swords of the Knights Templar

in Amando de Ossorio's *Tombs of the Blind Dead* (1971), and a role in Juan Bosch's quirky and enjoyable 1974 giallo *The Killer with a Thousand Eyes*. She quit the film industry soon after to marry Argentinian footballer Héctor 'Chirola' Yazalde, whose career went stellar following his selection for Argentina's 1974 World Cup squad. After a move to Marseilles, Nichols and Yazalde headed off to the footballer's new home back in Argentina. A jealous lover, he forbade her to make any more films, even when Roman Polanski got in touch seeking her involvement in a forthcoming project, having pestered Jess Franco for her telephone number! (The couple have since split up.) For several years she scored work in Argentina as a model and TV actress under the name Carmen Yazalde. Note: her character's name in the film is a derivation of her real name.

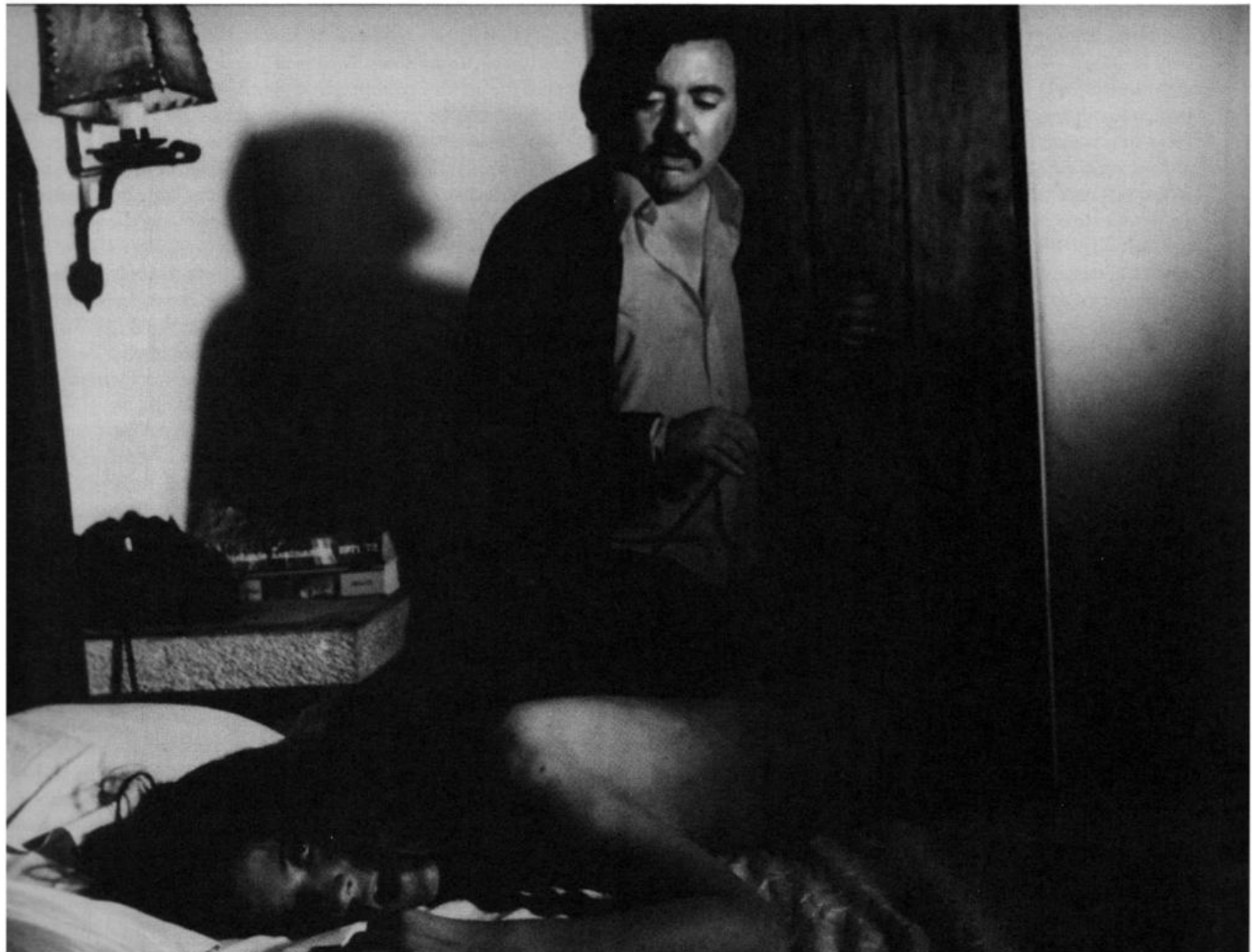
**Music:** Composer Bruno Nicolai brings to the film a barrage of aural stimulation. From beautiful female vocals in the style of Edda Dell'Orso, to rock workouts for bass guitar, electric organ and synthesiser that sound like something from Faust's classic avant-rock collage LP *The Faust Tapes*, there's so much going on. Each scene resonates with striking cues, some of which Franco actually plays, having visited Nicolai in the recording studio and contributed to the sessions himself (it's Franco bashing the hell out of the insides of a piano on some of the wilder pieces) ... In what could be my favourite ever scene in a Franco film, the family gather for a sing-song around Herminia's casket, with the dead woman sitting bolt upright in a chair. Uncle Howard pumps out a melancholy drone on the harmonium, and the assembled throng half-sing, half-speak their contributions, which range from snippets of non-sequitur Latin ("Sic transit gloria mundi" and "Sine qua non") to gobbets of total gibberish. Britt Nichols paints her toenails in the foreground and contributes a variety of artfully x-flat-minor interjections, sounding for all the world like German chanteuse Nico circa *The Marble Index* or *Desert Shore*.

**Locations:** The opening shots of a car driving from the seafront to the country were filmed in Spain (see also *Sexy Darlings*). We can clearly read a road sign by the water's edge in one brief moment, announcing the location as Lo Pagán, which is a region of Murcia on the shores of the Mar Menor in Spain, where Franco often filmed. In some shots a spit of land can be seen across the water; this is a narrow causeway that separates from the sea the large salt-water lake which is the region's most notable feature ... All of the remaining footage, however, was shot in Portugal. As Christina and Basilio are driven to Montserrat Mansion by an unseen chauffeur they drive through narrow groves of dense vegetation just outside the gorgeous town of Cascais, north of Lisbon. The rest of the film was shot on location at the Conde de Castro Guimarães Palace in Cascais, and the nearby town of Sintra. Christina's encounter with a strange old man on the steps of a small chapel takes place at the Capela de São Sebastião. The steamy exoticism of the region and its fantastical architecture would continue to obsess Franco, featuring prominently in *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein*, *Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun* and *Aberraciones sexuales de una mujer casada*.





*Above left: two images from Jean Rollin's additional 'zombie shoot' (see 'Other versions'); note stand-in for Cristine von Blanc. Above right: Christina awakes in terror.  
Below: Basilio (Jess Franco) murders Linda (Linda Hastreiter) for trying to help Christina.*



**Connections:** The original title made no mention of zombies, but if we persist in thinking of this as a zombie film then it's another of those odd early-1970s 'living dead' films (like *Let's Scare Jessica to Death*, *Deathdream* or *Messiah of Evil*) which ignore the thematic and conceptual architecture of George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) and strike out on their own ... Christina's voice-over ("These flowers and plants, they're bursting with life, and yet they have such strange dull colours...") recalls the H.P. Lovecraft story *The Colour Out of Space* ... The heroine's encounter with her undead father recalls a similar situation in *Dr. Orloff's Monster* ... Anne Libert's "Queen of the Night", as she is referred to in press materials for the film, is a symbolic figure mentioned by the Countess Carody in *Vampyros Lesbos* ... Franco would restage certain aspects of the story in slightly more coherent form in 1973's *Al otro lado del espejo*, which also concerns a young woman morbidly preoccupied with her dead father who died by hanging ... The theme of a young maiden under threat from evil forces may have taken root in Franco's imagination while shooting *Jungfrauen Report*, a film that ruminates on the veneration of the virgin throughout history.

**Other versions:** The story behind the distribution of *Virgin among the Living Dead* is quite a tangle. Originally filmed in late 1971 with the shooting title *La Nuit de l'étoile filante* ("The Night of Shooting Stars"), and produced by Franco himself under the business alias of 'Prodif Ets.', it was screened at Cannes (the Film Market, not the Festival) in 1973, after which two new versions emerged almost simultaneously. The first, called *Une vierge chez les morts vivants*, was submitted for a French Visa number in April 1973. It was listed as a Belgian production, suggesting the input of Eurociné's Belgian offshoot Brux International Films. Confusingly, however, the only existing prints of *Une vierge chez les morts vivants* list the producers as Prodif Ets (Franco's own company) and an extremely obscure company called J.K. Films. (It appears they're an Italian firm, although curiously the letters 'j' and 'k' are not used in the Italian alphabet except in 'loan words' from other languages.) A second version, called *Christina Princesse de l'érotisme*, emerged the same year from the Paris-based Comptoir Français du Film Production. *Christina Princesse de l'érotisme* increases the sex quotient by adding a tedious orgy in a distinctly bourgeois garden, with Alice Arno sitting on a throne presiding over three copulating couples, among them Wal Davis and Pierre Taylou. (Neither Arno, Davis nor Taylou appear in the original 1971 footage). The new material is inserted after a shot of Christina tossing and turning in her sleep, so presumably we're meant to believe that Arno, who's wearing a mask, is Christina. She also wears a crown and waves a sceptre, thus making her the 'Princess' to which the new title refers, although how Christina can be said to be a 'princess of eroticism' when she's supposed to be a virgin is anyone's guess. The additional scene completely ignores the central theme of innocence abused, not surprisingly, as it was directed by Pierre Quérut, of Eurociné's Belgian business partners Brux International

Pictures... Five years later, in 1978, a version called *Desideri erotici di Christine* was cleared for cinema release in Italy. It's listed in Italian production sources as a co-production between J.K. Films, Comptoir Français du Film Production, and Brux International Films, suggesting that *Desideri erotici di Christine* retained CFFP's Alice Arno/Pierre Taylou footage. A fourth variation, the most commonly seen on video in the days before DVD restoration, was released in 1981 by Eurociné, who insisted on cutting in atrocious 'creepy zombie' inserts, shot by French cine-poet Jean Rollin on one hell of an off-day. "Marius [Lesoeur] told me to do that," Rollin explained. "We did it really quickly. Just filmed some people dressed up as zombies. I don't think I ever saw Franco's movie."<sup>1</sup> Alain Petit's *The Manacoa Files* reveals that Eurociné were inspired to add the zombie inserts after the commercial success of Rollin's *Le lac des mort-vivants* (aka *Zombies' Lake* [onscreen title]), which despite its poor reputation made quite a lot of money for the company ... Many years later, in 2003, the DVD company Kino-X released a 'director's cut' with the newly generated onscreen title *Christina Princess of Eroticism*. This is full of peculiarities, most notably in the dialogue which has been repeatedly looped to fill gaps where the available English dialogue fell short, creating a bizarre 'scratch-video' effect. Regrettably, it also dispenses with the travelling shots of the waterfront at Lo Pagán, Spain, instead constructing a new credit sequence from slow motion shots of the Conde de Castro Guimarães Palace ... The English dubbing track, as first heard on the 1980s video release and copied over on subsequent English language DVD releases, is also worthy of mention. During the reading of the will, Antonio de Cabo (playing the notary) announces the date as "September the 1st 1980". This suggests that the English track was created in 1980 ahead of the Eurociné release in 1981; note also that the man sitting outside the Chapel of St. Cecilia says, "Poor Cecilia. Her chapel has been closed for years, ever since the General died." Despite the Portuguese settings, this must be a reference to General Franco, who died in 1975, five years before the English dub. Whoever supervised the English recording must have assumed the film was shot in Spain. This reference to 'The General' (General Franco being the only figure who could plausibly be referred to in such definitive terms) also occurs on the French track at this point, which suggests that unless the original script was set in the future, after the death of General Franco, the English and French dubs were both recorded after 1975. And if this is so, what has happened to the original 1973 French track? ... Finally, a confusing Italian film poster for something called *Esorcismo per una vergine* (sometimes said to be a variant of *AVirgin among the Living Dead*) lists the cast of Jean Rollin's *Requiem for a Vampire* headed by *Virgin among the Living Dead*'s Britt Nichols.

**Problematica:** The IMDb currently adds the following incorrect cast members: Luis Barboo and Fernando Bilbao. Some sources state that Nadine Pascal appears in the additional Pierre Quérut-directed scenes but this is a confusion with France Nicolas. Rose Kienkens, also credited on IMDb, is unconfirmed.

## DRACULA PRISONER OF FRANKENSTEIN

Portugal, Spain, Liechtenstein [& France] 1971

French visa number: 39569

*Original theatrical title in country of origin*

**Drácula Prisoneiro de Frankenstein** (POR)

**Drácula contra Frankenstein** (SP) *Dracula versus Frankenstein*

**Dracula prisonnier de Frankenstein** (FR)

note: there is no 'Liechtensteinian' version of the film

*Alternative titles*

**Die Nacht der offenen Särge** (GER theat.) *Night of Open Coffins*

**Dracula contro Frankenstein** (IT theatrical)

**Dracula Tegen Frankenstein** (BEL Dutch-language poster)

**Vampir Kill Die Nacht der offenen Särge** (GER video)

**The Screaming Dead** (US video)

**El doctor Frankenstein contra Dracula** (shooting title [MF])

*Unconfirmed titles*

**Drácula contra el Doctor Frankenstein** (SP alt. title [OB])

**Satana contra Dr. Exortio** (CITWF website)

*Production companies*

**Interfilme Produções Cinematográficas, Lda** (Lisbon)

**Cooperativa Fénix Films** (Madrid)

**Prodif Ets.** (Vaduz)

**Comptoir Français du Film Production** (Paris) [SP prints]

*Theatrical distributors*

**Chamartín Producciones y Distribuciones** (Madrid)

**Imperial Films** (Lisbon)

**Cocinor** [Comptoir Cinématographique du Nor] (Paris)

*Timeline*

Shooting date	November	1971
French visa issued	02 October	1972
Sitges Festival screening	04 October	1972
France (CNC)	17 October	1972
Bilbao (SMC)	18 November	1972
Madrid	03 January	1973
Barcelona	16 August	1973
Belgium (Brussels)	20 December	1973
Italy (Turin)	06 February	1974
Portugal	04 March	1974
Seville	16 June	1974

*Theatrical running time*

Portugal	82m
Spain	85m
France	85m

*Cast:* **Dennis Price** (Dr. Rainer von Frankenstein). **Howard Vernon** (Dracula). **Paca Gabaldón** [as 'Mary Francis'] (Maria, Dr. Seward's patient). **Alberto Dalbés** (Dr. Jonathan Seward). **Britt Nichols** (female vampire). **Geneviève Deloir** (Amira, the gypsy girl). **Josianne Pierette Belair** [as 'Josyane Gibert'] (Estela, a cabaret singer). **Anne Libert** (Dracula's 1st victim). **Luis Barboo** (Morpho). **Brandy** (The Wolf Man). **Fernando Bilbao** (The Monster). **Eduarda Pimenta** (married female victim). *uncredited:* **Daniel White** (Danny, 1st victim's father and man at the bar). **Antonio de Cabo** (married male victim).

*Credits:* directed by **Jess Franco**. story & screenplay: **Jess Franco**. director of photography: **José Climent**. editor: **Maria Luisa Soriano** [SP prints] / **R. Avenir** [FR prints]. set dresser: **Antonio de Cabo**. music: **Bruno Nicolai**, **Daniel White**. executive producer: **Arturo Marcos Tejedor**. production managers: **Luis Lasala**, **Jack Guy** [as 'Guy Gibert'], **Paul D'Alès**. assistant director: **J.M. Loubarri**. continuity: **Nicole Guettard**. camera operator: **Alberto Prous**. special effects: **Manuel Baquero**. make-up: **Elisenda Villanueva**. filmed in **Techniscope**. colour: **Eastmancolor** [SP prints] / **Telecolor** (Rome) [FR prints]. music publisher: **Gemelli**. *English-language version* by **David Mills**, directed by **Richard McNamara**. *uncredited:* French producer: **Robert de Nesle**.

'A fight to the death between two nightmare beings' - Spanish admat

**Synopsis:** *High above a village in eastern Europe stands a fog-shrouded castle belonging to Count Dracula. As soon as light begins to fade, Dracula is at large, killing a young woman as she prepares for bed, and menacing Maria, a painter and psychiatric patient at a clinic run by local physician Dr. Seward. Danny, the father of the latest victim, summons Seward, who realises that the girl has been attacked by a vampire. To prevent her from returning as one of the undead, he pushes a pin into her eye. Travelling by horse and carriage Seward visits Dracula's castle and makes his way to the crypt, where Dracula lies in a coffin. Seward stakes him and returns home. Meanwhile, a group of gypsies headed by Amira, a young female seer, are camped at the foot of the mountain. In town a motor-vehicle arrives; it's a hearse belonging to Rainer von Frankenstein. Morpho, Frankenstein's chauffeur, enters a local tavern to ask for directions to Dracula's castle. Danny gives him the information. Arriving at Castle Dracula, Frankenstein sets up his scientific apparatus and goes down to the crypt looking for Dracula. He finds a dead bat staked to the lining of a coffin. Frankenstein returns upstairs to his new laboratory and revives his Monster. He sends it to abduct Estela, a sexy nightclub performer from a local cabaret. The Monster brings her back to the castle, and using blood pumped from her living body Frankenstein succeeds in returning Count Dracula to human form. The Monster then deposits Estela in the incinerator, and carries Count Dracula back to his coffin for storage until needed. After the Monster has gone, a second coffin creaks open and a beautiful young female vampire emerges. She leaves*



to attack Amira. Frankenstein writes in his journal that he intends to use Count Dracula to create an 'army of shadows' who will subjugate humanity and make him ruler of the world. Frankenstein and Morpho take Dracula to Seward's clinic where he breaks in and bites Maria. After examining the bites on Maria's neck Seward realises that Dracula is at large again. While trying to remove Maria from the area, Seward is ambushed by the Monster, who knocks him out cold and abducts his patient. Maria becomes one of Frankenstein's army of shadows. She and Count Dracula are despatched by Frankenstein to abduct a rich married couple from the town. Working alone, the blonde vampiress attacks Morpho. Amira fights off the effect of the vampire's bite and nurses Seward back to health, informing him that tonight, the night of the full moon, a wolfman will attack the castle. She turns into a bat and flies out of the room. At the castle a showdown unfolds between the Wolfman, the vampire woman, Frankenstein's Monster, and Rainer von Frankenstein himself. The latter, realising his plans are doomed, burns the vampire woman with electricity, and stakes Count Dracula and Maria. The Monster is rendered inoperative by a power surge as he stands in his casket. Seward and the gypsies arrive and head for the crypt, where Seward prays over the skeletal remains, thanking God for his help in fighting Evil. But Dr. Frankenstein lives on...

**Production notes:** *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein* is an essential Jess Franco film that falls into the category of 'marvels made in haste' that would characterise much of his 1970s output. Although precise shooting details are unclear, a press article dated 9th December 1971<sup>1</sup> reported that *Dracula contra Frankenstein* had recently completed shooting in Alicante, while a press article about Paca Gabaldón [aka Mary Francis] dated 21 January 1972 describes the film as her most recent.<sup>2</sup> Bearing in mind that the film also features extensive shooting in Portugal we can surmise that it was begun during the same spell of shooting as *Christina Princess of Eroticism* and possibly *Jungfrauen Report* - November-December 1971.

**Review:** In late 1971 Franco returned to the theme of vampirism for a third bite of the jugular, and although *Vampyros Lesbos* the year before had dispensed with Gothic trappings, here they're back with a vengeance. *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein* is a kaleidoscopic mélange of classic horror imagery: in the first fifteen minutes we get a fog-shrouded castle, bats at the window, thunder and lightning, horse-drawn carriages at dusk, a dusty old diary, Dracula sucking blood from the throat of a screaming woman, cobwebbed coffins in a crypt, and a vampire staked through the heart. In fact the whole thing is steeped in the noisome vapours of Gothic fear from foggy start to fiery finish. Furthermore, Franco reaches back to traditions even older than the Universal horror pictures of the 1930s, as *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein* is virtually a silent movie. In the original Spanish version there's no dialogue during the first twenty minutes, and even when it does begin it remains brief and intermittent (the English export version breaks the silence with a

voice-over reading out a snippet of faux-Gothic text). Franco relies almost entirely on the visuals, allowing the narrative to progress without intrusive chit-chat.

Compared to *Count Dracula*, this is a film of much greater freedom and vitality. It revisits one of the same key locations (the Castle of Santa Barbara in Alicante) and shares a few of the same characters (Dracula; Dr. Seward; a band of gypsies) but takes a far more idiosyncratic approach than before. It's as though the shackles are off, and Franco can spread his wings at last. One imagines that after the rancour and criticism which greeted his serious adaptation of Stoker, a playful attitude and blithe disregard for the original text must have been just what the doctor ordered. *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein* is first and foremost a slice of Gothic eye-candy, in which a fantastical world is conjured out of eerie locations, crazy performances, a truly pathological disregard for plausibility, and the hissing of synthesised gales wrapping frostily around your brain.

Franco is at his zoom-happiest here, so be prepared. We are constantly pulled in and out of the image, with a devil-may-care energy that makes the camerawork in *Count Dracula* look positively Bressonian. But the ceaseless movement creates its own rhythms, a sort of 'breathing' that mimics the 'It's alive!' epiphany of Dr. Frankenstein's creation, or the queasy oscillation between attraction and repulsion that characterises vampirism. Occasionally, shots judder out of focus, but despite this the photography is often beautiful and impressive. Intelligent use is made of the widescreen frame, with compositions that achieve elegance despite the occasional raggedness of technique. Dracula's fog-shrouded castle, the darkling moodiness of the village streets, and the imposing shadows of the interiors, lend a touch of class that even the film's frequent absurdities don't compromise. In fact, absurdity is a major part of the fun. Everyone plays the film straight-faced, yet there's a lurking weirdness here that stems from a madcap sense of humour behind the camera.

It must be said, there are a few elements which viewers may find hard to swallow. For instance, why does Dracula never close his mouth, or move his eyes? Does Franco *intend* for us to laugh at Luis Barboo's manically gurning Morpho? Why do Seward and Frankenstein fail to notice that another vampire, played by the beautiful Britt Nichols, sleeps in the same crypt as Dracula? Why does it take just a gentle tap with a geologist's hammer to 'stake' the dark lord? And how can Seward enter Dracula's castle and despatch him so easily in the first place? Most perplexingly of all, why does everyone appear to be living in the 19th century, with capes and breeches and horse-drawn carriages, except for Doctor Frankenstein, whose chauffeur drives a 1950s hearse and a gleaming black Mercedes Benz 600?

Well, in reverse order... The shock appearance of Dr. Frankenstein's modern-day hearse is mitigated when one notices a juke-box in the murky bar-room at the start of the film, and a 1970s cash-register swathed in shadow on the counter. Various

shoddy transfers over the years have obscured these markers of modernity, but that still leaves us wondering why Dr. Seward dresses and departs himself like a man from a 19th century Gothic novel, and why he insists on travelling by horse and carriage. Given that he nips in and out of Dracula's castle so quickly, surely a minicab would have sufficed? As for the ease with which Seward despatches the vampire, it's one of those puzzling scenes in Franco's cinema where disdain for special effects results in crazily effete efforts substituting for robust action. This seems to be born of financial restraint – effects are expensive, not least because of the faffing-around they require on set. Time is money, and Franco's appetite for fast shooting clearly brooks no dissent from pernickety effects designers, with their test shots and safety issues and complicated jiggy-pokery. The question of how both Seward and Frankenstein remain oblivious to Britt Nichols' vampire woman is much more confusing, leaving us to wonder who on Earth she's meant to be. As for dear old Morpho, Franco gamely reaches back to the heavily theatrical Igors of the Universal era for inspiration. Luis Barboo's facial contortions are surely meant to convey menace, but instead they put one in mind of a comedy bumpkin stubbing his toe on an anvil. The one element that leaves me mystified, even after multiple viewings, and with a sense of humour firmly in place, is Howard Vernon's 'Aunt-Sally' approach to playing Count Dracula. In the follow-up, *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein*, he's terrifyingly intense as the evil Cagliostro, wringing maximum menace from his wide-angle close-ups. Here, he honestly looks as if he's trying to make Dennis Price 'corpse' – he sits in Frankenstein's car like an abandoned ventriloquist's dummy, fangs bared as if caught in mid-sneeze. I suppose you can either fume with annoyance at these enigmas, or simply thank your lucky stars that such a defiantly eccentric film was ever made...

*Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein* came at a time when traditional Gothic horror was in marked decline. The Hammer studio was nearing its death-throes, with such miscalculated efforts as *The Horror of Frankenstein* (1970) (which turns the scientist into a boorish womanizer), *The Scars of Dracula* (1970) (a tired 'back to basics' retread with a few sprigs of extra violence), and *Dracula A.D. 1972* (1972) (an amusing but incredibly gauche 'update' that instead of reviving the franchise had the unfortunate effect of hastening its demise). Franco, ever the cinéaste, chose to ignore the stuffy old Hammers and look back to the dying days of the Universal horror cycle, when parody, pastiche and everything-but-the-kitchen-sink plotting were the order of the day. Clearly as much a fan of Erle C. Kenton's oddball Gothics – *Ghost of Frankenstein* (1943), *House of Frankenstein* (1944), and *House of Dracula* (1945) – as the James Whale and Tod Browning originals, Franco invests *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein* with a loopy chaotic decadence, allowing the iconography of these sacred monsters to leap free of their literary corsetage. It's an approach that may alienate those more interested in the 'serious classics' of the genre, but it's a

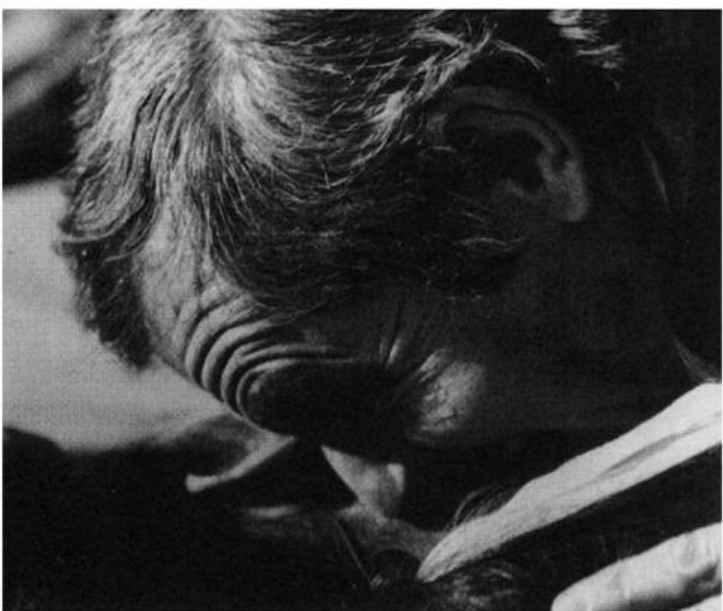
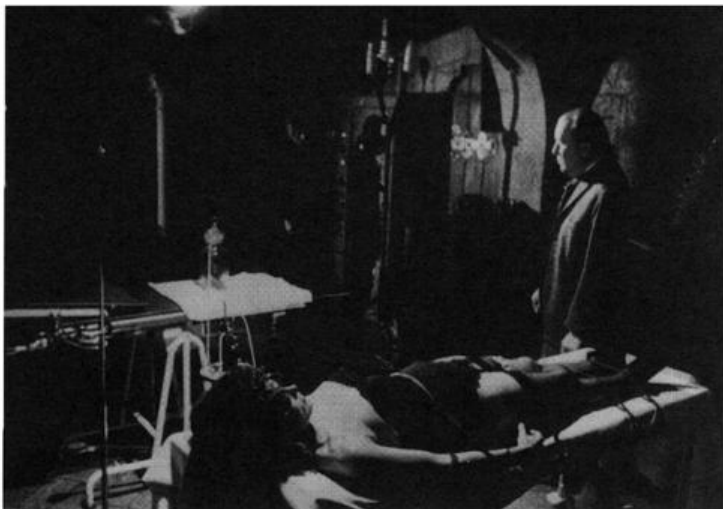
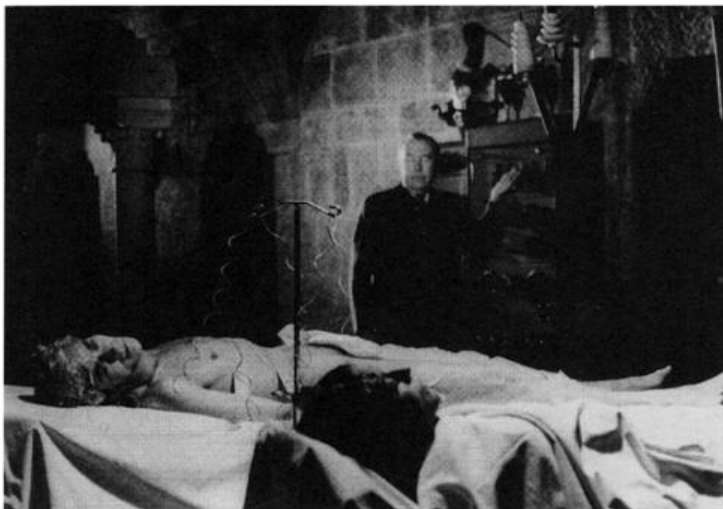
creaky coffin-full of pleasure if you're willing to go with it. Franco treats his monsters rather in the way ancient heroic tales use the gods of myth; as figures to be re-made and re-modelled in ever-changing storylines, rather than icons fixed in aspic. A great deal of ink has been expended in debating the cultural significance of the Frankenstein and Dracula stories, but Franco is not really working at a symbolic level here, so there's little of importance to ponder, except perhaps to wonder why science (Dr. Frankenstein) is drawing on mysticism (Dracula) to furnish solutions – that is, if his plan to create an army of vampire slaves is a concept worth taking seriously, which I strongly suspect it isn't. Franco's combination of avant-garde technique and commercial imagery is rooted instead in a sense of play, and the free mutation of ideas. Logic be damned, he seems to be saying. In *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein* he brings horror icons together like a child playing with his Aurora glow-in-the-dark toys, and to hell with coherence. Just as with *A Virgin among the Living Dead*, sense and senselessness collide, fragments dominate the whole, images take precedence over narrative, time and spatial relations are unstable and unreliable. Whether by accident, wilful design, or an improvisational combination of the two, Franco has evoked here the true characteristics of the dream state. Compared to the staid and sensible world of Hammer, he's right out there, creating ramshackle pulp surrealism in an Expressionist toy shop of the macabre. Viewed through this frame of reference, the rough edges of *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein* are far from regrettable; they're intrinsic to its worth.

**Cast and crew:** Actress Geneviève Deloir subsequently married Canadian producer and director Ivan Reitman, best known for creating the *Ghostbusters* franchise. Now known as Geneviève Robert, she is the mother of actor-director Jason Reitman, and actresses Catherine Reitman and Caroline Reitman.

**Music:** Most of the music is drawn from Bruno Nicolai's scores for *Justine* and *Count Dracula*. Some versions also credit Daniel White, although he had little if any involvement.

**Locations:** The Santa Barbara Castle in Alicante, and the Palácio dos Conde Castro Guimarães, in Cascais, Portugal.

**Connections:** Erle C. Kenton's weird and wonderful *House of Frankenstein* (1944) can be seen as a template, with its episodic narrative, exploitation of Count Dracula by a rogue scientist, and an appearance from the Wolf Man in the final reel ... Franco's Frankenstein Monster abducts beautiful nightclub performers, just like Morpho did in *The Awful Dr. Orlof* (and Frankenstein's manservant here is called Morpho) ... Franco was not the only director playing with his Aurora toys at the start of the 1970s; Paul Naschy's werewolf films were making a fair few pesetas too, with *Werewolf Shadow* (released in Spain in May 1971) cementing Naschy as the Wolf Man in the minds of Spanish cinema-goers. It's reasonable to suppose, therefore, that as well as echoing *House of Frankenstein*, Franco was knowingly competing with Naschy by hurling a lycanthropic monster into the mix ... Despite using Google translation in twenty different Eastern European languages,



*Clockwise from top left: Count Dracula (Howard Vernon) finds life under the yoke of Dr. Frankenstein unbearable; his female vampire accomplice (Britt Nichols) agrees; Dr. Frankenstein drains blood from Estela, a sexy nightclub performer (Josyane Gibert); Dracula does what he does best; Britt Nichols delivers a scorching 'vampire on the rampage' expression; Frankenstein drains more blood, this time from a married couple played by Antonio De Cabo and Eduarda Pimenta.*





including the Baltic, Transcaucasian, Southeastern European and former Soviet tongues, I've been unable to ascertain what language is used in the notes passed between Luis Barboo and Daniel White; I suspect they belong to some previously unknown language discovered by that well known ethnographer and cunning linguist David Khunne ... Finally, Fernando Bilbao's Monster bears an uncanny resemblance to the version later played by Peter Boyle in the 1974 Mel Brooks' comedy *Young Frankenstein*!

**Other versions:** Although available now on DVD from Spain, the USA and Great Britain, the only accurately framed version remains a video from Japan, which preserves the original 2.35:1 ratio. While the English-language DVD is far superior in picture resolution, the Japanese tape is essential to appreciate the skill of Franco's original framing. Concurrently with the original shoot, a 'sexier' version, with less clothing for the female victims, was created; Jean-Pierre Bouyxou reports seeing it at the 1972 Cannes film market (apparently it was being presented for sale by Canadian company Cinepix, who were also touting Franco's 'Liechtensteinian' productions *Eugenie* and *Nightmares Come at Night*).<sup>3</sup> Sadly, it has so far proven elusive on video or DVD, with just one surviving still to taunt the curious.

**Problematica:** Although Alberto Dalbés is called 'Dr Jonathan Seward' in the English-language dubbing, his onscreen diary bears the name 'Emmanuel Seward'. The BBFC website claims that 'Dracula V Frankenstein', directed by Jesús Franco, was cleared for an uncut 'X' certificate on 22 March 1971. However, this is incorrect. It would seem that the BBFC database is confusing Franco's film with the similarly titled *Dracula vs. Frankenstein* (*Los monstruos del terror*, Tulio Demicheli, 1970).

**Press coverage:** At the time, this was a divisive title in Franco's career. *La Vanguardia* were fairly appreciative: "This still young filmmaker has taken on two of the great myths of scary cinema. The film is like a big 'get together' of the monsters who have appeared on the big screen since this type of cinema was at its height in the thirties ... The plot is delirious. Frankenstein launches his science using Satanic resources, which creates confusion of the first order. Jesús Franco is unsparing with the dramatic effects: everywhere are shadows, gloomy locations, apparitions, sarcophagi, hallucinations, and phantasmagoria. The effect on the audience varies. While some react with screams of surprise and gestures of anxiety, others, perhaps less sensitive to the horrific, can barely suppress their laughter. The result, however, is that the film entertains..."<sup>4</sup> *El Mundo Deportivo* meanwhile blew hot and cold: "[Franco] has not been too successful in any of the film's facets: the plot lacks originality; the direction is all too focussed on the cinematography, wanting to say it all through the image, interspersing minimal expression through dialogue in such manner that what is achieved in cinematographic and interpretative quality is lost in rhythm. Since the photography is good, and the director's recognised talent is not missing, he manages the difficulties with dignity, as he is experienced in the genre, having directed other horror films before."<sup>5</sup> *ABC Madrid* were less equivocal, sniffing, "Jesús Franco has mixed, in a conventional way, all the ingredients of

fright stirred up by these tamed horror film myths, without achieving anything new. This genre requires either first class technical quality like that of the specialised English directors, or a truly extraordinary mixture of humour and talent like those displayed by Roman Polanski in *Dance of the Vampires*. Jesús Franco has at his disposal neither the material nor literary means to accomplish such a feat."<sup>6</sup> The response from organised horror fandom, then in its infancy, was equally negative. *Dracula contra Frankenstein* was very poorly received at the 1972 Sitges Film Festival, with *Variety* complaining that the film suffered from a preponderance of clichés and expressing bewilderment with the uncertain historical setting. Even more damning, considering that it came from a magazine with a special interest in the genre, the French *L'Ecran Fantastique* described "[the] grievous *Dracula contra Frankenstein*" as "an indigestible hotchpotch", "a waste of film" and "a scenario of rare ineptitude; in short, a total wreck. Karloff and Lugosi must be spinning in their graves!"<sup>7</sup> *Cinefantastique* observed that, "Franco is a devotee of the Universal horror films of the 1940s, and has been highly influenced by their production style. In fact, certain scenes in his film parallel directly scenes from these earlier films," before concluding dismissively: "his reverence for the Universal style never results in anything more than mimicry."<sup>8</sup>

## DRACULA'S DAUGHTER

### Portugal [France & Spain] 1972

French visa no: 39661

Original theatrical title in country of origin

**A filha de Drácula** (POR) Daughter of Dracula

**La Fille de Dracula** (FR) Daughter of Dracula

**La hija de Drácula** (SP)

Alternative titles

**De dochter van Dracula** (BEL theatrical) Daughter of Dracula

**De vloek van Dracula** (NL video) The Curse of Dracula

**Eine Jungfrau in den Krallen von Vampiren** (GER DVD)

**La Main d'un Assassin** (shooting title) The Hand of an Assassin

**Las vampiras y el sexo** (SP) planned 2003 but never happened

Production companies

**Interfilme Produções Cinematográficas, Lda** (Lisbon)

**Comptoir Français du Film Production** (Paris) [uncredited]

**Cooperativa Fénix Films** (Madrid) [uncredited]

Theatrical distributors

**Comptoir Français du Film Production** (Paris)

No record found of Portuguese theatrical release

◀ Maria (Paca Gabaldón) rises from the tomb with Dracula (Vernon); Poor Estela (Josyane Gibert), afraid of needles...

*Timeline*

Shooting date	circa Jan/February	1972
French visa issued	13 December	1972
France	14 December	1972
Belgium (Brussels)	17 January	1974

*Theatrical running time*

France	78m (some sources say 79m)
Spain	74m

**Cast:** **Britt Nichols** (Luisa Karlstein). **Anne Libert** (Karine, Luisa's cousin). **Alberto Dalbés** (Police Superintendent Puschko). **Daniel White** (Count Max Karlstein). **Jess Franco** (Cyril Jefferson, Count Karlstein's secretary). **Howard Vernon** (Dracula). **Yelena Samarina** (Ana Kramer, hotel owner and Jefferson's wife). **Eduarda Pimenta** (1st victim). **Conchita Núñez** (Margot, café waitress).

**Credits:** director: **Jess Franco**. screenplay & adaptation: **Jess Franco**. director of photography: **José Climent** [as 'Pepe Climens']. original music by **René Sylviano**. laboratory: **G.T.C.** (Joinville-le-Pont). *uncredited:* French producer: **Robert de Nesle**. Spanish producer: **Arturo Marcos Tejedor**. still photography: **Howard Vernon**. colour: **Eastmancolor**.

**Note:** The German DVD release of this film as *Eine Jungfrau in den Krallen von Vampiren* features a newly-created title sequence and adds the following credits: editor: **Roberto Fandiño**. music: **Daniel J. White**. additional music: **Jess Franco**, **Exequiel Caldas**. executive producer: **Arturo Marcos Tejedor**. production manager: **Victor [de] Costa**. camera operator: **Javier Pérez Zofio**. costumes: **Carlos Viudes**. make-up: **Elisenda Villanueva**. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid**. props: **Mateos - Menjibar**.

**Synopsis:** *A Spanish coastal town in the present day. A young woman is murdered in her home by a shadowy female presence. At the one-time home of Count Dracula, the Karlstein family gather. The seriously ill Countess Karlstein gives her daughter Luisa a key to the locked basement of a chapel crypt, and implores her to go there: "You must find out why I am dying." Before Luisa can obey, the Countess expires. Police find the body of the earlier victim on the beach. Charlie, a journalist, takes an interest in the case, and it emerges that locals attribute the crime to the supernatural. Count Karlstein's secretary, Cyril Jefferson, chides the journalist for mocking this mystical explanation. Luisa enters the basement and finds two coffins; Count Dracula emerges from one of them. Later, a shadowy figure terrorises Luisa's cousin Karine in the Karlstein castle bedrooms. The next day she and Luisa reminisce about their close childhood friendship before making love. A second woman is killed; Miss Dorian, a dancer at a local nightclub. An eyewitness is beaten across the head with a wooden cane by the fleeing killer. The victim's description of the cane leads the police to suspect Count Karlstein, who walks with a*

*limp. Charlie breaks into the Karlstein castle and finds the cane. However, Ana Kramer, Jefferson's wife and the owner of a nearby hotel, reveals that she was with Karlstein at the time of the murder, making love in a hotel room, thus giving him an alibi but revealing the Count's betrayal of his friend and secretary. Jefferson elects to forgive Ana and announces that he will put an end to the monstrous vampire curse. He enters the crypt but hesitates when he sees Luisa and Count Dracula asleep in their coffins. Charlie and the Superintendent arrive. Charlie takes the stake from Jefferson and hammers it into Count Dracula's forehead, while the Superintendent sets fire to Luisa's coffin.*

**Production notes:** Shooting virtually non-stop by now in the neighbouring Portuguese towns of Sintra and Cascais, Franco mounted another vampire story, hot on the heels of *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein*. The result, *Dracula's Daughter*, seems likely to have been a 'back-pocket' affair, dependent on adjacent productions for its finance. Despite being available only as a French version called *La Fille de Dracula*, the film was (according to French-language prints) a Portuguese production from Lisbon-based Interfilme, with no French or Spanish money involved. Comptoir Français du Film Production distributors, and through their auspices the film saw theatrical release in France and Belgium.

Although the film was never released theatrically in Spain, a 2003 German DVD release as *Eine Jungfrau in den Krallen von Vampiren*, made with Franco's personal involvement using a French-language print, credits two Spanish companies belonging to producer Arturo Marcos – Cooperativa Fénix Films (now defunct) and Marte Films (Marcos's successor to Fénix). Both are listed as copyright holders of *Eine Jungfrau in den Krallen von Vampiren*. Oddly, Cooperativa Fénix Films were *not* credited on the 1970s French print; they were however a company with whom Franco did regular business circa 1971-1973 (for instance, they were official co-producers of *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein* and *Devil's Island Lovers*, the films made immediately before and after *Dracula's Daughter*). Is it then reasonable to wonder whether the German DVD sees Franco belatedly acknowledging that Cooperativa Fénix – knowingly or unknowingly at the time – co-funded *Dracula's Daughter*?

**Review:** *Dracula's Daughter* is the weakest in a loose Gothic 'trilogy' that begins with *Dracula, Prisoner of Frankenstein* and climaxes with *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein*. Somehow it manages to be both more conventional and less coherent than its delirious siblings, although Franco contrives several scenes of peculiar charm and there are occasional glimpses of what might have been.

Despite the impeccable Transylvanian credentials extended by the title, the first few minutes are more akin to a giallo film of the early 1970s, as a lurking figure (represented by a close-up of a staring eye) observes a young woman enjoying a bath. A subjective camera ducks behind doors to avoid being seen by the victim-to-be, stretching our credulity by wandering into direct view without the woman reacting. The attack is the work of a darkly-dressed



COMPTOIR FRANÇAIS DU FILM PRODUCTION

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DANS



# LA FILLE DE DRACULA

AVEC

**HOWARD VERNON**

SCÉNARIO ET RÉALISATION **JESS FRANCO**



interdiction aux moins de 16 ans

ÉDITIONS CINE



figure glimpsed in a shadowy blur; the archetypal giallo killer. And yet the thriller vibe is misleading, because we're actually in supernatural territory, with vampires, bloodsucking, and an appearance by Count Dracula himself. Mysteriously, however, the theme of vampirism is downplayed and obfuscated, resulting in a mongrel whodunit upon which supernatural concepts are haphazardly superimposed, as if the after-image of *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein* had burnt itself onto Franco's creative retina.

Carefully photographed for the most part (save for a few out-of-focus zooms), and dignified with a delightful, even whimsical orchestral score, *Dracula's Daughter* nevertheless squanders these attributes with a senseless narrative in which characters pop in and out of the story without explanation. Plot threads unravel in confusion: for instance, with a laxity of protocol that would enrage any nobleman, Count Karlstein goes un-introduced by name for over half an hour, leaving us wondering who the hell he is. The story has a simple enough narrative conceit at its centre, but it nevertheless feels muddled. Scenes that ought to have dramatic weight are thrown away, including (amazingly) all those featuring Count Dracula. Elsewhere, relationships in general are either underdeveloped or else occluded by panicky editing, which seems to be fighting a losing battle with a dearth of appropriate footage.

It's difficult to say whether the film fails because it lacks focus, or because Franco is trying too hard to tell a 'straight' story and fumbles the ball. In *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein* a purposeful delirium engulfs all aspects: plotting, music, editing, camerawork and performances. *Dracula's Daughter*, on the other hand, is a relatively sober film in many ways, yet it's hobbled by undeveloped scripting, and a sense that the director is eager to pack up and move on with the story only half-told. It may seem rich to criticise the film for being a mess, given the magical decoherence I praise elsewhere in this book, but there is a genuine distinction to be made; *Dracula's Daughter* is a straightforward story that's been neglected in the writer's busy schedule, rather than a giddy free-fall through genre imagery. The craziest flaw, especially given the title, is that no dramatic capital is made of Luisa Karlstein's transformation from naive young woman to lesbian predator. The garbled storyline subdues her into a minor role lacking focus or menace. In fact she's so lackadaisically presented that we struggle to comprehend exactly what she's doing much of the time. The central relationship ought to have been that of Luisa and the Count, with the incestuous/necrophiliac possibilities played up-front. Instead, much of what's happening must be guessed at by the audience. Entering Dracula's crypt, Luisa clutches her neck in a premonitory spasm of horror, but we never see the monster pounce, nor for that matter get out of his coffin! Britt Nichols brought a wonderfully icy, dislocated quality to her role as Carmencé in *A Virgin among the Living Dead*, but as Luisa Karlstein she's less than captivating, only really coming to life during an erotic lesbian bloodsucking scene with Libert.

The narrative ends in disarray. Count Karlstein limps off never to return after his mistress blows the cover on their romantic affair.

We know virtually nothing about him; he's expressed not a word of concern for his daughter, nor so much as an opinion regarding the black past of his family. Jefferson, Karlstein's secretary, announces that he will destroy the vampire, to "*wipe out the monstrous breed*". However, he flunks the job when he gets to the crypt, leaving the heroics to Charlie, a largely peripheral journalist. Charlie stakes Count Dracula through the forehead, while a cop we couldn't care two hoots about sets fire to the unspecified and almost indistinguishable occupant of the second coffin. It's supposed to be Luisa, but you'd never guess from the way it's shot. We're given no close-ups of Britt Nichols, and information is further withheld by an unhelpfully low camera angle. Only the tip of a nose, and a glimpse of long hair, allows us to suppose that the ostensible star of *Dracula's Daughter* is being immolated, a carelessness (or strategic avoidance?) that will leave many viewers tutting with exasperation.

Despite these failings, there are still – as so often in Franco – incidental pleasures along the way. The sinister, gloomy atmosphere is a palpable pleasure throughout, we get to witness Franco's favourite composer and close personal friend Daniel White at the piano, and it's always a pleasure to see Yelena Samarina, whose distinctive haunted features also enhanced one of the best Paul Naschy films, *Werewolf Shadow* (1971). *Dracula's Daughter* is far from top-flight Franco, but if you love his more accomplished work you will probably enjoy a visit to this minor attraction too. Newcomers, however, will find it a puzzling experience at best.

**Franco on screen:** Franco plays the Karlstein family secretary, Cyril Jefferson, who emerges as the most interesting character in the film. Cuckolded by his wife Ana (or Ana Kramer, as the script oddly insists) who's been having an affair with Count Karlstein, he decides to forgive her, and his dialogue with the woman he loves is the highlight of the film. Though humiliated, he accepts her plea to save their marriage, adding a gentle but devastating reproach: "*I'm the last resort. You'll stay with me because you see no other solution, that's all ... Maybe one day we will tolerate each other with indifference, like old fools.*" Franco's acting is excellent here, and the lines ring true in a way the rest of the film doesn't even try to match. His character is also the sole voice speaking in favour of belief in the supernatural, although to the police he's just a nut, with Superintendent Ptuschko commenting, "*You're obviously an educated man, Jefferson. But you choose to believe in such silly things.*"

**Music:** French sources credit the music to René Sylviana (sic). René Sylviano, born in 1903, was a composer whose previous scores (for Georges Combret's *I Am a Fugitive from a White Slave Gang* and Riccardo Freda's *Les Deux Orphelines*) dated back to 1965. The more recently generated German credits name Daniel White, with 'additional music' by Jésus Franco and Ezequiel Caldas.

**Locations:** *Dracula's Daughter* is another film shot in and around the Palacio de Montserrat and the Palacio Conde Castro Guimarães in Cascais. The latter stands in not only for The Karlstein castle, but also the police station, the police cells, and the lobby of Ana Kramer's hotel! Other scenes were shot in Sintra (Portugal) and



Murcia (Spain). Scenes featuring Daniel White leaving the police station and being accosted by Charlie the reporter were shot in La Villajoyosa (aka La Vila Joiosa), a picturesque coastal town between Benidorm and Alicante. Franco would return there in 1973 for the aborted production *La casa del ahorcado*.

**Connections:** The name 'Karlstein' echoes 'Carmilla Karnstein' from Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, and turns up again in Franco's 1973 film *Female Vampire*. After Count Karlstein is arrested on suspicion of murder, his mistress saves him at the cost of blowing the cover on their affair, a plot element recycled from Franco's *The Sadistic Baron von Klaus*.

**Other versions:** None. The film should not be confused with the similar *Las hijas de Dracula* (Dracula's Daughters), which is a Spanish VHS title for José Larraz's *Vampyres* (1974).

**Problematica:** The IMDb currently adds the following incorrect cast members: Luis Barboo, Fernando Bilbao and Lina Romay.

## DEVIL'S ISLAND LOVERS

**Spain, France [& Portugal & Liechtenstein] 1972**

Spanish depósito légal number: M-31800/72

French visa number: 40749

*Original theatrical title in country of origin*

**Los amantes de la isla del Diablo** (SP) *Lovers of Devil's Island*

**Quartier des femmes** (FR) *Women's Quarters*

*Alternative titles*

**Violenze erotiche in un carcere femminile** (IT theatrical)

*Erotic Violence in a Women's Prison*

**Los amantes del diablo** (SP video) *Lovers of the Devil*

**Quartier de femmes** (FR video cover)

**Amores Satânicos** (POR DVD) *Satanic Lovers*

**Maison de filles** (FR alt. theatrical [CNC]) *House of Women*

**Violences érotiques dans une prison de femmes** (FR alt.)

*Erotic Violence in a Women's Prison*

**Les Amants de l'île du diable** (shooting title) *Lovers of Devil's Island*

*Production companies*

**Cooperativa Fénix Films** (Madrid)

**Comptoir Français du Film Production** (Paris)

**Interfilme Produções Cinematográficas, Lda** (Lisbon) [*Quartier des femmes*]

**Prodif Ets.** (Vaduz) [*Quartier des femmes*]

*Theatrical distributors*

**Delta Films, S.A.** (Barcelona)

**Eurociné** (Paris)

### Timeline

Shooting date	09 February	1972
Italy (Turin)	25 October	1973
French visa issued ( <i>Maison de filles</i> )	18 February	1974
France premiere	23 March	1974
Madrid	12 May	1975
Barcelona	19 January	1976
Seville	06 July	1977

### Theatrical running time

France	93m
Spain	97m

**Cast:** **Andrés Resino** (Raymond Franval). **Geneviève Deloir** (Beatriz Coblan). **Dennis Price** (Lindsay, lawyer). **Rosita Palomares** [as 'Rosa Palomar'] (Señora Cardel, prison director). **Josianne Pierette Belair** [as 'Josyane Gibert'] (Rosa, the snitch). **Danielle Godet** (Emilia de Franval). **Gogó Rojo** (Lola, red-haired prisoner). **Jean Louis** [as 'Jean-Louis Collins'] (Lieutenant Weckler). **Howard Vernon** (Colonel Ford, prison warden). **Jean Guedes** (Governor Carlos Mendoza). **Luis Barboo** (Corporal Lenz, Cardel's aide). **Britt Nichols** (Maria, blonde prisoner). **Anne Libert** (deaf brunette prisoner). *uncredited:* **Daniel White** (tribunal judge). **Eduarda Pimenta** (prisoner with malaria). **Pedro Besari** (black hotel employee).

**Credits:** directed by **Jess Franco**. story & screenplay: **Jess Franco** [SP prints] / screenplay & technical script: **Ken Globus & Jess Franco** [FR prints]. dialogue: **Jack Guy** [as 'Yves Coste'] [FR prints]. director of photography: **José Climent**. editors: **Maria Luisa Soriano** [SP prints] / **S. Aventer** [FR prints]. set dresser: **Jean d'Eaubonne**. music: **Bruno Nicolai**. producer: **Arturo Marcos Tejedor**. production manager: **Jack Guy** [as 'Guy Gibert']. 1st assistant production: **Luis F. Rodríguez**. 2nd assistant production: **Alberto Marcos**. assistant director: **Ana María Settimó de Esteva**. continuity: **Nicole Guettard**. camera operator: **Alberto Prous**. still photography: **Christian Hart**. make-up: **Monique Adelaide**. assistant make-up: **Elisenda Villanueva**. filmed in 'scope'. colour: **Eastmancolor**. laboratories: **Fotofilm Madrid, S.A. & Telecolor** (Rome). sound recordist: **Jesús Jiménez**. sound re-recording: **Cinearte, S.A.**. "We thank the Alicante authorities and manager of the Castillo de Santa Barbara for their assistance in the making of this film." *uncredited:* French producer: **Robert de Nesle**.

**Synopsis:** *An unnamed South American dictatorship... Governor Carlos Mendoza is dying. Plagued by feelings of remorse on his death-bed, he summons Lindsay, a lawyer, whom he entrusts with righting one of his many wrongs; the false imprisonment, at two separate penal institutes, of a young couple, Raymond Franval and Beatriz Coblan. Years earlier, Mendoza had arranged for the two to be locked up on charges of political*

insurrection and framed for a murder he committed; in fact the real reason was that Mendoza's mistress Emilia de Franval wanted Raymond, her godson, punished because he refused to sleep with her, whilst Mendoza was angry with Beatriz, his wife's sister, with whom he'd been infatuated. Raymond is worked to exhaustion at the prison run by the rule-bound Colonel Ford; Beatriz suffers under the corrupt sadistic lesbian governess Señora Cardel. She forms a friendship with Rosa, a snitch who survives by offering sex to the guards. Rosa is attracted to Beatriz, but their friendship grows into something more. Rosa decides to help Beatriz, using her charms on the guards of both prisons. Meanwhile Raymond is locked in a battle of wills with a brutal prison guard, Lieutenant Weckler. Rosa forms a sexual liaison with Weckler, who becomes infatuated and lets slip the fact that Raymond is still alive. Rosa passes the information back to Beatriz, and hatches a plan to bring Beatriz and Raymond together and free them from their respective jails. The two escape, but are recaptured and face death by firing squad. Their survival depends on the efforts of Lindsay, who has Colonel Mendoza's death-bed confession...

**Review:** *Devil's Island Lovers* is among the more narratively complex women-in-prison dramas Franco directed, a sober, well-balanced story that manages to work within the confines of the genre whilst making a barbed attack on the reality of living in a fascist state, where the powers that be act without principle. As such, *Devil's Island Lovers* is among Franco's most overt attacks on the governance of his homeland; it's no surprise that he left Spain soon after, nor that the film had to be shot in Portugal and set in South America; more so than any previous Franco film the barbs are aimed at the regime of General Franco, and the shift of location to an unnamed South American dictatorship does the bare minimum to disguise the fact.

Corruption is the key concern; those who rule are characterised by petty jealousy, egocentrism, and pure stupidity. Their pernicious influence liberates the cruelty of their underlings, who then prop up the decadent power structure with mindless brute force. Even the figures here who would normally be heroic are shown as depleted or decrepit, making the point that this is not to be consumed as a simple heroic wish-fulfilment fantasy, with action adventure set-pieces and the cathartic righting of wrongs. The film ends on a bitter, cynical note, as lawyer Dennis Price, with his stained suit and alcoholic exhaustion, tries and fails to make a difference in the face of a doltish judiciary's refusal to recognise the validity of his clients' struggle. Even the confession of wrongful imprisonment from the Governor himself is not enough to free these 'enemies of the state' because while imprisoned they had attempted to escape! Such a Kafkaesque system, in which the law is held sacrosanct even when corrupt, is typical of authoritarian thinking, where rules matter more than principles.

The potency of *Devil's Island Lovers* lies in its serious tone; the same story could have been told with a greater degree of lip-smacking voyeurism, but Franco elects to keep a straight face and focus upon the injustice of incarceration more than the sensational

details. It's interesting to note the absence of one of the WIP film's major tropes; the cruelty of other prisoners. None of the girls is a match for the wickedness of the Governess, and none of the other men in prison with Raymond are monsters on a par with the brutal prison guard Weckler or the blinkered and rule-bound Colonel Ford. This is clearly a deliberate rhetorical device, because violence and exploitation between prisoners is as common in the WIPs as lesbian governesses dishing out electro-shock punishments. Franco is operating here on a less nihilistic level than usual, with a clear distinction between the wronged and the wrongdoers. We do not, with the exception of Beatriz, get the usual panoply of secondary background stories; the imprisoned heroine represents everyone's plight. One can argue that this sentimentalises the situation, that it veers towards romanticising: the virtues of the oppressed are enhanced, and their failings suppressed, to avoid muddying the waters and distracting the viewer from the criminality of the system. If we accept that argument, we must also accept that the film has a political purpose far in advance of Franco's other WIP films; what he's saying here, with a rare absence of cynicism, is that the crimes of the individual pale in comparison to the monstrosity of the state and the wickedness of a corrupt and violent ruling class.

**Music:** A sombre yet strident orchestral score here by Bruno Nicolai, featuring a strong declamatory brass section delivering an essentially tragic melody with fire and gravitas.

**Locations:** Cascais (Portugal), Elche (Spain), and Alicante (Spain) specifically the Santa Barbara Castle.

**Studio:** Filmed at Estudios Balcázar (Barcelona).

**Connections:** *Devil's Island Lovers* is not to be confused with *Women of Devil's Island* aka *Le prigioniere dell'isola del diavolo* (d: Domenico Paolella, 1962), nor should the Italian theatrical release, *Violenze erotiche in un carcere femminile*, be confused with Bruno Mattei's *Violenza in un carcere femminile* (1982).

**Other versions:** The French version *Quartier de femmes* delivers some of the sexual explicitness and sadomasochistic spectacle that *Devil's Island Lovers* skips. In doing so the result is certainly more of a piece with Franco's other WIP films, with whipped female buttocks, sustained nudity, threesome sex scenes, and generally it offers more of what the exploitation fan is looking for. That this still doesn't overbalance the film is a testament to Franco's grasp of tone and his diligent focus on the righteous anger of the victims. Rosa, in particular, comes across even more heroically; she is the voice of resistance to oppression, and although tainted by certain compromises she is doing the best she can in an impossible situation (one might even venture a parallel between Franco and Rosa, inasmuch as the demands made upon him to add salacious new material frequently required compromises on his part.) Musically, in addition to the Spanish version's themes, *Quartier de femmes* borrows Bruno Nicolai cues from *Nightmares Come at Night* and *A Virgin among the Living Dead*.

**Problematica:** Jean Guedes is credited as 'Colonel Devon' on French credits.

## THE EROTIC RITES OF FRANKENSTEIN

### Spain & France 1972

Spanish depósito legal number: M-32130/72

French visa number: 39725

*Original theatrical title in country of origin*

**La maldición de Frankenstein** (SP) *The Curse of Frankenstein*

**La malédiction de Frankenstein** (FR theatrical/FR video)

*Alternative titles*

**Les Expériences érotiques de Frankenstein** (BEL theatrical)

*The Erotic Experiences of Frankenstein*

**[The] Curse of Frankenstein** (English-language theatrical)

**De Verdoemenis Van Frankenstein** (NL video title)

*The Damnation of Frankenstein*

**The Rites of Frankenstein** (US DVD cover title)

**Eine Jungfrau in den Krallen von Frankenstein** (GER DVD)

*A Virgin in the Hands of Frankenstein*

**Les Plaisirs de la nuit** (pre-release [CNC])

*The Pleasures of the Night*

*Unconfirmed titles*

**Les Exploits érotiques de Frankenstein** (FR pre-release [OB])

**La Fille du docteur Frankenstein** (EC) *The Daughter of Dr. Frankenstein*

**Das Blutgericht der Gequälten Frauen** (GER title [MF])

*The Criminal Court of the Tortured Women*

**The Damnation of Frankenstein** (Export title [MF])

**The Erotic Adventures of Frankenstein** (CAN theatrical?)

*Production companies*

**Cooperativa Fénix Films** (Madrid)

**Comptoir Français du Film Production** (Paris)

*Theatrical distributors*

**Bilbaína Films** (Bilbao)

**Comptoir Français du Film Production** (Paris)

**Titanus Films** (Brussels)

*Timeline*

Shooting date	circa March/April	1972
Additional sequences	June	1973
French visa issued	08 January	1973
France*	15 March	1973
Belgium (Brussels)	26 July	1973
Sitges Festival screening	02 October	1974
Madrid	03 May	1976
Barcelona	28 May	1976

\*some sources claim 1st French release 31 May 1975

*Theatrical running time*

France

73m

Spain

84m

*Cast:* **Alberto Dalbés** (Dr. Jonathan Seward). **Dennis Price** (Dr. Frankenstein). **Howard Vernon** (Cagliostro). **Beatriz Savón** (Vera Frankenstein). **Anne Libert** (Melisa, the bird-woman). **Fernando Bilbao** (The Monster). **Britt Nichols** (Madame Orloff). **Luis Barboo** (Caronte, Cagliostro's manservant). **Daniel White** (Inspector Tanner). **Doris Thomas** (Myra, the painter's model). **Lina Romay** (Esmeralda, the gypsy). **Jess Franco** (Morpho, Dr. Frankenstein's assistant). *uncredited:* **Eduarda Pimenta** (Abigail, Vera Frankenstein's lab assistant). **Nicole Guettard** (Greta, Madame Orloff's maidservant).

*Credits:* directed by **Jess Franco**. story & screenplay: **Jess Franco** [SP prints] / adapted by **Jess Franco** [FR prints]. director of photography: **Raúl Artigot**. editor: **Roberto Fandiño**. set dresser: **Jean d'Eaubonne**. music: **Daniel White** [SP prints] / **Armando Sciascia** [as 'H. Tical'], **Vincent Geminiani**, **Robert Hermel**, **Vladimir Cosma** [FR prints]. executive producer: **Arturo Marcos Tejedor**. presented by [i.e. French co-producer]: **Robert de Nesle** [FR prints]. production manager: **Robert de Nesle** [SP prints]. production manager: **Victor de Costa** [FR prints]. location manager: **Victor Vázquez**. assistant production: **Francisco Nuño**. assistant director: **José Antonio Arévalo**. continuity: **Nicole Guettard**. camera operator: **Alberto Prous**. camera assistant: **Marius Perier**. still photography: **Christian Hart**. set decorator: **J. de Alberto**. make-up: **Monique Adelaide**. assistant make-up: **Antonia Nieto**. laboratory: **Fotofilm, S.A.**. sound re-recording: **Cinearte, S.A.**. sound technician: **Jesús Jiménez**. music publisher: "Musique pour l'Image" [FR prints].

**Synopsis:** *The immortal magician and mesmerist Cagliostro, who resides in the Castle of Barna, a fantastical palace overlooking the sea, despatches his devoted acolyte Melisa the Bird-Woman and his manservant Caronte to steal Dr. Frankenstein's Monster. Breaking into Frankenstein's laboratory, Melisa claws Dr. Frankenstein with her talons and kills his assistant, Morpho. She and Caronte deliver the Monster, stored in a large trunk, to Cagliostro, who dominates it with his mesmeric powers. He plans to use it to abduct young women, whom he will dismember to create his own female Monster. The two Monsters will then mate, creating a super-race conditioned to obey Cagliostro's will. When villagers find the dying Dr. Frankenstein wandering the forest, they take him to his old friend and rival, Dr. Seward. Before dying of his injuries, Frankenstein tells Seward what has happened, and begs him to retrieve the Monster for science. Seward talks about the case to Inspector Tanner, the local policeman. At Frankenstein's funeral, Seward meets Vera Frankenstein, the dead man's daughter, who is herself a scientist. That night, with her lab assistant Abigail, Vera disinters her father's corpse and takes it back to his castle. Using her father's re-animation equipment, she*



brings him back to life, long enough for him to explain what happened. Vera vows that she will retrieve the Monster and continue her father's work. That night, Frankenstein's Monster abducts a local noblewoman called Madame Orloff. In the woods, a local gypsy girl hears the voice of Cagliostro in her mind, telling her she has been chosen to continue his name and dynasty; she prays to the Virgin Mary to help her resist his call. In the forest, the bodies of the dead revive at Cagliostro's bidding, and gather at his castle. Cagliostro instructs Caronte to behead Madame Orloff while the assembled corpses watch. Vera Frankenstein and Abigail spy on Caronte and the Monster as they leave the Castle of Barna to abduct a new victim: Myra, a painter's model. Vera Frankenstein takes Myra's place and has herself abducted in order to gain entrance to Cagliostro's castle. Melisa, who has been left behind by Caronte, is hit in the face with a riding whip by Abigail as she makes her escape. When Melisa explains what happened, Cagliostro is furious with Caronte. He also realises that the abductee is not Myra but Vera Frankenstein. The mesmerist devises a 'sport'; Caronte and Vera are tied naked, back to back, in a circle of knives. The Monster then flogs the pair: the only way to survive is for one to push the other onto the blades. Vera proves to be the more survival-orientated of the two. At Seward's surgery, Seward and Tanner question Abigail, who reveals that Vera is at Cagliostro's castle. They also question the deceased Dr. Frankenstein by reviving him with his magnetic ray device. Meanwhile, Cagliostro hypnotises Vera to assist in the creation of a female Monster, which has the head of Madame Orloff. Seward and Tanner break in to the Castle of Barna and see Vera Frankenstein preparing her father's Monster to procreate with Cagliostro's. The dead are summoned once again to witness the ceremonial impregnation. Seward shouts out that Cagliostro killed Dr. Frankenstein; the enraged Monster goes on the rampage, but Cagliostro manages to protect himself with his mesmeric powers and the crazed Monster instead attacks Vera Frankenstein. Tanner shoots the Monster in the head, rescuing Vera. Cagliostro drives off in his carriage, apparently steering the horses into the sea. Vera Frankenstein tells Seward that in nine months' time Cagliostro will be reborn...

**Production notes:** The most extraordinary of Franco's Portuguese Gothics, *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein* was made circa March/April 1972 (a shooting permit was applied for on 24 March 1972, at which point Franco almost certainly began filming: the permits themselves were often granted months later, a delay he can scarcely have tolerated at this point in his career).

**Review:** Frankenstein and his silver Monster ... an insane mesmerist ... a murderous bird-woman ... walking corpses ... nude flagellation ... voyeuristic skeletons ... castles and crypts and coffins... *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein* is awash with strange sights and sounds, and is one of my personal favourites in the Franco canon. From the opening scene, as Dr. Frankenstein practises surgery on his screaming Monster (a musclebound hulk sprayed silver from head to toe), Franco announces in no uncertain terms that he intends to crank up to eleven the delirium which engulfed

his previous monsterfest, *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein*. In doing so he introduces his freakiest creation yet; Melisa the Bird-Woman, played by Anne Libert wearing feathers, talons, a cape, and little else. Entering Frankenstein's laboratory, she lets loose a demented peacock cry before clawing at the confused scientist and killing his cringing servant Morpho (played by Franco himself). Who could resist the sight of this feathered chimera, her mouth ululating to the shrieks of some tropical bird? It's Anne Libert's signature role and she's amazingly sexy and strange, exuding a dazed, beatific sensuality that Franco uses to convey rapturous abandon to the arousing capacities of evil. I'm particularly fond of the way she conveys her psychic link with Howard Vernon's malevolent Cagliostro, as though picking up blissful transmissions from another dimension. Is this how the Manson girls felt? Libert could have played a terrifying Patricia Krenwinkel...

Cagliostro is the most memorable in a long line of hypnotic Svengalis in Franco's filmography and it's gratifying that we see a lot more of the master-controller than in other films with this theme; the shots of Howard Vernon's eyes filling the screen bring us closer to the traditional image of the malevolent mesmerist than ever before. Vernon gives it his all, in a role as iconic and memorable as Dr. Orloff. He plays Cagliostro in the style of a deranged cult leader (shades of Manson again), and whether in lordly long shot or eyeball-boggling close-up he fits the bill perfectly. The only person in the leading cast who seems to struggle is poor old Dennis Price. At his peak, Price was an actor of mellifluous voice and noble bearing, neither of which attributes emerge here; the alcoholism that engulfed his later years is all too obvious (although I suppose his role as a frequently re-animated cadaver somewhat limits the scope for poise and grandeur).

*The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein* is easily the most delirious of Jess Franco's Gothic horrors. The story may be nuts-whole-hazelnuts by normal standards, and the pacing is as unfocussed as ever, but the film is eventful, the soundtrack a delight, and the wide-angle compositions wonderfully stylish. Yes, several shots are out of focus, but their dreamlike beauty justifies their inclusion. Meanwhile the exploitable elements – murder, the reanimation of cadavers, acid attacks, mesmerism, sadomasochistic torture – ensure that our salacious and morbid fascination is sustained throughout. No one who has seen the film can forget the sequence in which Caronte (Luis Barboo) and Vera Frankenstein (Beatriz Savón) are stripped nude and trussed back-to-back in a circle of knives, then whipped until one or the other falls onto the blades. A heavily muscled silver monster horsewhipping a naked man and woman, while shrouded skeletons gather round to watch? Franco is delving into the fetish imagery of the Italian fumetti comic-strips and populating his parallel universe with unforgettably perverse and garish images.

Naturally, as this is a low budget production shot in two weeks, there are 'flaws' that will amuse some and appal others; for instance, Beatriz Savón reads her lines quite blatantly off the back of a medical skeleton's shoulder during the scene in which Vera

Frankenstein swears to continue her father's work, and as Seward and Tanner climb through the upstairs window of Cagliostro's castle, a modern car goes by on a road behind them. But if you enjoy these goofs for what they are, amusing accidents of a hurried schedule, then the film can transport you into a Gothic fantasy-land full of mystery and menace, populated by scheming supervillains, avian chimeras, enslaved musclemen, bat-eared weirdos, Felliniesque old ladies, and parodies of the living dead. You're unlikely to care a jot about the heroic or vulnerable characters, and quite right too because neither does Franco. This is a film in which playful malice and pictorial pleasure outweigh such mundanities as plot or structure. We're careening through cartoon images while skim-reading a Gothic potboiler, we're drunkenly recollecting a handful of bizarre moments from macabre literature, we're tumbling into the pages of a lurid horror comic. There's simply no need to give a damn about the 'decent' characters. The only possible figures for whom we might care are Cagliostro and Melisa, whose maniacal machinations are conveyed with such intensity by Vernon and Libert that one almost feels like joining them in their erotically charged world of mind control and S&M dungeon parties...

**Franco on screen:** Playing Morpho, Franco has little to do except man the controls in Frankenstein's laboratory, but his hunched, cringing appearance – a sleazy Hobbit in a lab coat – is memorable nonetheless.

**Cast and crew:** Sultry, raven-haired beauty Anne Libert apparently enjoyed every minute of her time with the Spanish director, exhausting though it all could be. She told the French magazine *Stars System* in 1978: "I went to Portugal with a guy who wanted to make horror movies, Jess Franco. It's amazing with him: when it was raining we did a film where it was raining, when it was fine we did another, we did several at once, it was crazy! We did cinema as they had to do it in 1920. We were really out of breath there, working day and night. It was the only time in my life when for a scene I shot in a bed, I really slept! I played it really well! We were really exhausted. It was like that on *The Demons* where I played the good sister ... In Portugal, there are no unions: we were shooting day and night, we ate when we finished at two in the morning, or with plates in our hands while filming ..."<sup>21</sup>

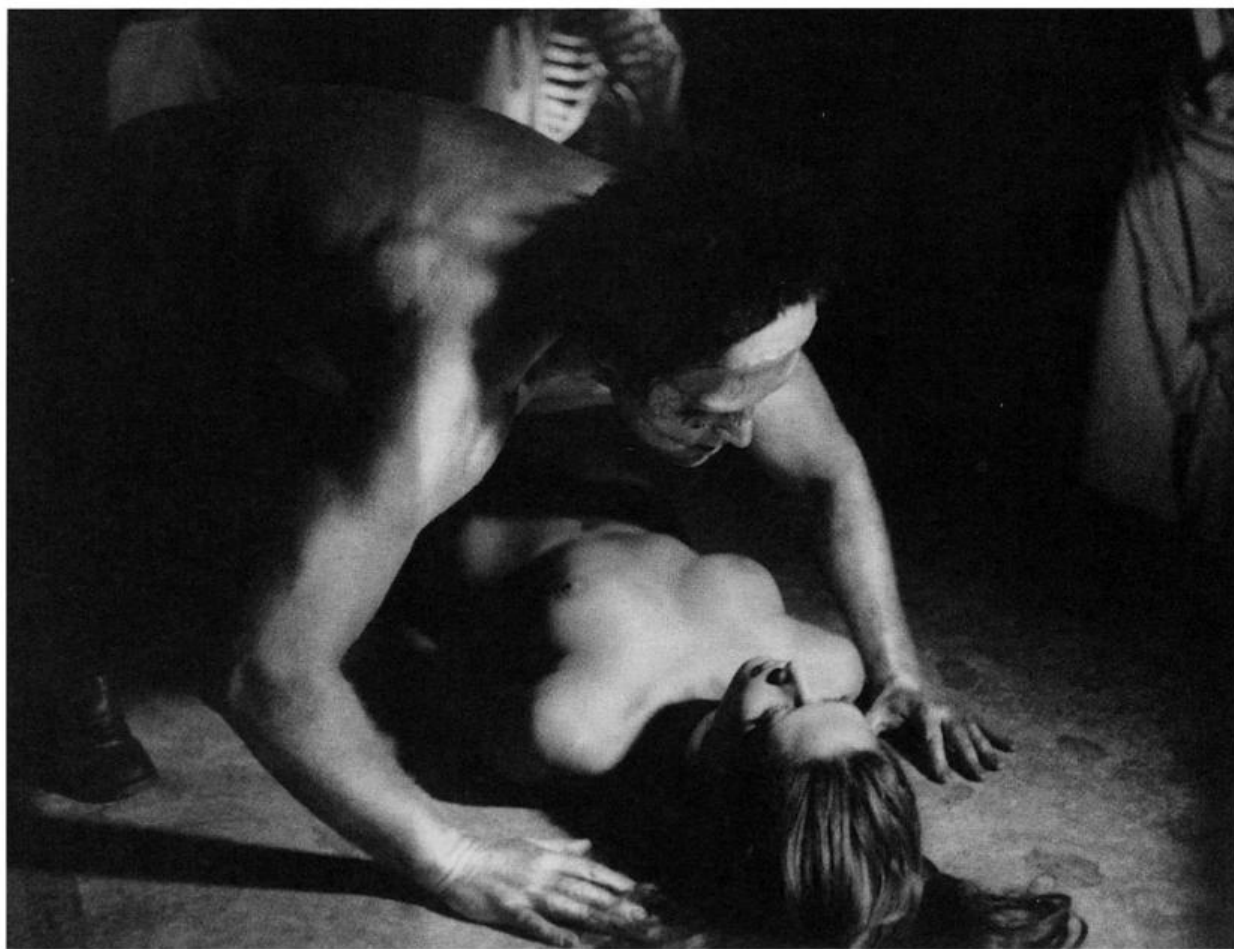
**Music:** Kicking off in the Spanish version with a frenzied workout for church organ that sounds like Keith Emerson in the midst of a nervous breakdown, the score is a riot of wonders. Far-out electronic music accompanied by detuned guitar skitters over the opening scenes, like the BBC Radiophonic Workshop jamming with Derek Bailey, while Franco himself twiddles knobs and dials in the background, for all the world as if he's creating the music himself. I've been unable to ascertain the library source for the flute-and-violin piece which accompanies frequent shots of Cagliostro's castle, but other themes include the fantastically psychedelic 'Psycho-Nébuleux' by H. Tical (aka Jean-Michel Lorgère), the bowed-cymbal high frequencies of 'Transmutation' by Vladimir Cosma (during Cagliostro's mesmeric indoctrination of Frankenstein's monster), and two percussion-and-organ free-

form workouts by Vincent Gemignani – 'L'Oiseau Sans Pieds', and the appropriately named 'Promethee'.

**Locations:** Franco wrings maximum visual pleasure from the stunning Portuguese coastal locations. Cagliostro's lair is the Conde de Castro Guimarães Palace in Cascais, Portugal, as previously seen in *A Virgin among the Living Dead*. However, this is the only time Franco allows us a clear long-shot of the spectacular sea-facing side of the building. Some shots were gathered at the nearby Fortaleza do Guincho Hotel in Cascais, while the remaining scenes were shot in Barcelona, Murcia, and the interior of the Santa Barbara castle in Alicante. Sources also indicate that some work was done at Estudios Cinematográficos Balcázar, in Barcelona, during June 1973.

**Studio:** Estudios Balcázar (Barcelona).

**Connections:** Count Alessandro di Cagliostro (born Giuseppe 'Joseph' Balsamo) was a historical figure to whom one can easily understand Franco being attracted. A swindler and con-man who studied mesmerism and the occult, his reputation galloped ahead of him, accreting legend around a few (heavily disputed) facts. The result is a compellingly mysterious figure who bestrides the line between historical reality and literary fantasy. Johann Strauss II wrote an operetta about him, Alexandre Dumas featured him in several novels, George Méliès made a short film about him in 1899, and Friedrich Nietzsche referenced his name in his philosophical hand-grenade *Beyond Good and Evil*. Most importantly, given Jess Franco's proclivities, a version of Cagliostro was played by Orson Welles in the 1949 film *Black Magic*, based on a story by Dumas. He has become an archetype: the criminal mastermind with occult powers. Pop culture continues to add prismatically to his supposed attributes and talents, with DC Comics featuring him as an immortal, Robert Anton Wilson folding him into the pages of *The Historical Illuminatus Chronicles*, Umberto Eco referencing him repeatedly in the satirical *Foucault's Pendulum*, and Kim Newman welcoming him into the vampire fold in his *Anno Dracula* novels ... *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein* is without doubt the most delirious and successful of Franco's attempts to convey the visual thrills of the Italian *fumetti*, comic-strips with names such as 'Jacula' and 'Oltretomba'. These lurid fantasies were a significant influence on Franco's early 1970s horror films. In the French magazine *Stars System*, Anne Libert explained another of Franco's sources: "You know where he found his scripts, his stories, Jesús Franco? In those small 'books dessinée', what are they called? ['Bandes dessinées' is the term for a variety of Franco-Belgian comic-strip, sometimes but not always of a fantastical or sexual nature.] ... You see, he found all his ideas there."<sup>22</sup> ... *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein* features many of the cast seen in *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein*. Vernon, Price, Dalbés, Libert, Bilbao, Barboo, Nichols, Pimenta, all return, as do character names from earlier films. Dr. Seward is back; one of the female victims of Cagliostro is called Madame Orloff; the time-travelling Inspector Tanner (played here by composer Daniel White) makes his fourth appearance, following *The Awful Dr. Orloff*,







*Sadisterotica* and *Eugenie*; Morpho, the deformed assistant from *The Awful Dr. Orloff*, turns up again, played by Jess Franco himself, and Melisa the Bird-Woman shares her name with Dr. Orloff's daughter ... Cagliostro's plan to mate women with Frankenstein's Monster to create a slave super-race under his psychic control echoes Frankenstein's plan to create an army of vampire slaves in *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein* ... Cagliostro resides at the Castle of Barna, a likely derivative of 'Varna', the Bulgarian town referenced in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* ... Seward's use of word association to question the traumatised Abigail recalls the use of the technique in *Succubus* ...

Mind-control is a vital and evolving theme of Franco's cinema. Over the years, the explanations morph from scientific to psychological, and from there into hazier regions of supernatural influence. As a plot device it first emerges in *The Awful Dr. Orloff*, where the demon doctor's control over his lobotomised servant, Morpho, is achieved by surgery. In *Dr. Orloff's Monster*, Dr. Fisherman controls the reanimated cadaver of his dead brother using a combination of sound signals and behavioural training, and in *The Diabolical Dr. Z* enslavement is achieved using brain surgery and sci-fi technology (i.e. steel pins shoved deep into the brain). *Attack of the Robots* saw the villains controlling humans over long distances with the aid of Bondian gadgetry; technology again. It's only with *Succubus* that we move on from the surgical and technological and into something more nebulous: the nature of the control exerted over the heroine Lorna by her mysterious 'creator' is purposely left vague and undefined (as are many other elements in this surpassingly vague film). Then there's the mind control exerted by the killer artist over his lycanthrope in *Sadisterotica*, by the villainous gay lovers over their Andros musclemen in *Kiss Me Monster*, by Fu Manchu over his osculating beauties in *The Blood of Fu Manchu*, and by Dracula over Lucy (one of horror's most famous hypnotic subjects) in *Count Dracula*. With *Nightmares Come at Night* we see Franco honing the concept, with a dominant woman steering a vulnerable female victim to commit murders through means of post-hypnotic suggestion, thus taking the Irma-Nadia relationship in *The Diabolical Dr. Z* and filleting out the cod-science. Technological mind control pops up again in the retro-chic *La venganza del doctor Mabuse*, psychic seduction is the name of the game in *Vampyros Lesbos*, and goodness knows how the zombieified men running around in *The Devil Came from Akasava* are being controlled – the film is in too much of a hurry to explain. Which brings us to *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein*, with its confluence of science and magic giving Dr. Frankenstein control over both his Monster and the King of the Vampires, and *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein*, in which Melisa the Bird-Woman accepts Cagliostro's will gladly, Vera Frankenstein's will is obliterated, and Dr. Frankenstein finds the shoe is on the other foot as he becomes a pawn of the insane mesmerist. Later uses of the theme include *The Sinister Eyes of Dr. Orloff* (1973) involving drugs and hypnosis, *Shining Sex* (1975) in which drugs are administered by an alien

mesmerist, *Voodoo Passion* (1977) in which voodoo mind control is used by unscrupulous whites, *Macumba sexual* (1981) which features an unambiguously magickal mesmerist, *El siniestro Dr. Orloff* (1982) which returns to the clapped-out remnants of 1950s technology, *Mil sexos tiene la noche* (1983) which scarcely explains its methods leaving us to assume hypnosis, and *Sola ante el terror* (1983) in which supernatural forces are at work once again.

**Other versions:** Two versions of *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein* were filmed at the same time; one 'clothed' and one 'nude', and it's definitely the latter that's the more desirable of the two; sadly it has yet to turn up on DVD, being available only on VHS as *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein* (from the collectible Go Video pre-cert label) or as *The Curse of Frankenstein* on Dutch VHS. The differences are not numerous, but they do matter; when Vera Frankenstein and Cagliostro's traitorous manservant Caronte are trussed together in a circle of knives and whipped by the Frankenstein monster, the clothed version covers Beatriz Savón's breasts and hides Luis Barboo's manhood behind a Tarzanesque loincloth; in the nude version they're both uncovered. And let's face it, a nude whipping scene trumps a clothed one any day of the week. Madame Orloff's bedtime preparations are a bit more revealing in the 'nude' version, so fans of Britt Nichols should look out for the video versions, and there's a classic Franco crotch shot during the lead-up to the impregnation of a prone female by the Frankenstein Monster. The clothed version also loses a scene entirely, in which a bored and bad-tempered Cagliostro throws two naked women out of his bedchamber. Another point in favour of the 'nude' version; it's dubbed into English, and surprisingly well for a low budget picture; the actress voicing Melisa is especially striking and convincing. It also has the virtue of brevity, clocking in at a svelte and action-packed 70 minutes ... A year later, just after shooting *Countess Perverse*, Franco added approximately twelve minutes of new footage, featuring Lina Romay as a gypsy girl cursed by Cagliostro. (Apparently there was concern that the film was too short.) Unfortunately the added scenes are leaden and pointless – the film works much better without them. Also thrown in at the same time, though much more appealing aesthetically, were several shots of cowed revenants walking through misty woodland on their way to Cagliostro's castle. Note that the forest location is identical to the one in the opening and closing scenes of Franco's *La Comtesse noire*, which tells us roughly when (the autumn of 1973) and precisely where (Madeira) the extra material was shot. The UK pre-certificate video omits the tedious gypsy scenes, but loses the atmospheric walking dead shots and a few worthwhile dialogue scenes. *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein* is crying out for a sympathetic and definitive digital release; sadly, no DVD or Blu-ray version currently does justice to this essential Franco classic.

**Press coverage:** The film's first encounter with the Spanish press was pleasingly warm, with Barcelona-based newspaper *La Vanguardia* catching it on a first-run double bill with Arthur Marks' US exploitation flick *Bonnie's Kids*, and extolling it as: "A horror

movie in line with what is usual in this genre, but perhaps a bit more extreme. Increasingly you have to provide more reasons for horror and surprise, and in this endeavor Jesús Franco does not fall short. During the movie we see the rebirth of Cagliostro and a woman (a bird of prey) who feeds on human flesh."<sup>3</sup>... At the Sitges Horror Festival line-up in October 1974, however, the same newspaper's festival reporter had taken a different view, with a repeat of the hostility that greeted *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein* in 1972: "...a horror story that mixes all kinds of elements and concepts of terror, magic, mythology. It's a film that managed to raise more than a little laughter [thanks to] grotesque dialogue and naïve deductions from bombastic policemen." The reviewer concluded by asking why Sitges would even include such a film in its programming.<sup>4</sup>

## THE DEMONS

### Spain, France & Portugal 1972

French visa number: 39850

*Original theatrical title in country of origin*

**Les Demons** (FR)

**Os Demonios** (POR)

*Alternative titles*

**Les Novices perverses** (BEL FR-lang theatrical)

**Ontaarde Novicen** (BEL Dutch-lang theatrical) *Degenerate Nuns*

**De Bruiden van Satan** (alt. BEL Dutch-lang theatrical)

*The Brides of Satan*

**Die Nonnen von Clichy** (GER theatrical) *The Nuns of Clichy*

**Le demone** (IT theatrical)

**Les Enfants du démon** (FR video) *Children of the Devil*

**Le demoni** (IT video)

**Las poseídas del demonio** (DVD) *Those Possessed By the Devil*

**Les Demons du sexe** (FR pre-release theatrical) *The Sex Demons*

*Unconfirmed titles*

**The She-Demons** (alt. US theatrical)

**Les Demons sexuels** (reported in a 1972 French filmography)

*Production companies*

**Fénix Films** (Madrid)

**Marte Films** (Madrid)

**Comptoir Français du Film Production** (Paris)

**Interfilme Produções Cinematográficas, Lda** (Lisbon)

*Theatrical distributors*

**Comptoir Français du Film Production** (Paris)

**Howard Mahler Films** (New York)

**Cinecenta Film Distributors** (London)

No Spanish or Portuguese distribution

*Timeline*

Shooting date	circa May	1972
Rejected by the BBFC	23 March	1972
French visa (as <i>Les Demons du sexe</i> )	12 January	1973
France	18 January	1973
Belgium (Brussels)	29 March	1973
Italy (Turin)	20 June	1973
USA (Madison, WI)	31 May	1974

*Theatrical running time*

France	101m
West Germany	85m
UK	97m

*Cast:* **Anne Libert** (Sister Kathleen de la Valle). **Britt Nichols** (Sister Margaret de la Valle). **Alberto Dalbés** (Captain Thomas Renfield). **Karin Field** (Lady de Winter). **Howard Vernon** (Lord Malcolm de Winter). **Doris Thomas** (Mother Rosalinda, the mother superior). **Cihangir Gaffari** [as 'John Foster'] (Lord Justice Jeffreys, 'Grand Inquisitor'). **Luis Barboo** (Truro, Jeffreys's hangman). **Andrés Monales** (Brian de Quincey, a painter). *uncredited:* **Rosita Palmoras** [as 'Rosa Palomar'] (old witch). **Caroline Rivière** (woman at banquet to Brian de Quincey's right).

*Credits:* directed by **Jess Franco**. based on the novel "*Las monjas de Clichy*" by **David Khunne**. written by **Jess Franco**. director of photography: **Raúl Artigot**. editor: **Roberto Fandiño**. set dresser: **Carlos Viudes**. music: **Daniel White**, **Jess Franco** [SP prints] / original music: **Jean Bernard Raiteux** [FR prints]. additional music: **Exequiel Caldas** [SP prints]. executive producer: **Arturo Marcos Tejedor**. production manager: **Victor [de] Costa**. assistant director: **Ricardo Franco**. continuity: **Nicole Guettard**. camera assistants: **José Climent**, **Javier Pérez Zofio**. make-up: **Elisenda Villanueva**, **Nina Seara**. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid**. wardrobe: **Anahory** (Lisbon). music publisher: **Musique pour l'Image** [FR prints]. *German version* by **Siegfried Krämer**. *uncredited:* FR producer: **Robert de Nesle**. sound editor: **Gérard Kikoïne**. foley: **Henri Imbert**.

**Synopsis:** *A woman accused of being a witch is tortured and then burned. As the flames lick higher she curses her persecutors – local noblewoman Lady de Winter, evil Lord Chief Justice Jeffreys, and his loyal assistant Captain Thomas Renfield – claiming that her daughters will one day avenge her. Lady de Winter is frightened by this threat and seeks Judge Jeffreys' approval in finding the witch's daughters, wherever they may be, and disposing of them. Meanwhile, her husband Lord Malcolm de Winter is a gentle soul who takes no apparent interest in his wife's*



zealous mission, preferring the consolation of star-gazing ... At a convent nearby, two sisters, Kathleen and Margaret, believed to be orphans, are being brought up by the church. Kathleen is headstrong and irreligious, while Margaret is devout and applies herself to her studies. The Mother Superior, Rosalinda, tells the convent's Father Confessor that she has witnessed Kathleen at night, writhing in erotic abandon, a sight which she admits aroused as well as disturbed her. The Father Confessor mentions this fact to Lady de Winter, who leaps to the correct conclusion; that these sisters may be the witch's daughters. Questioning Mother Rosalinda, Lady de Winter discovers that their maintenance is paid by a mysterious male benefactor who delivers a large sum every month. Mother Rosalinda admits there's a possibility that Kathleen might be a witch. Lady de Winter examines the two girls intimately and finds that Kathleen is not a virgin. She is taken away to be tortured. However, Lady de Winter and Captain Renfield both find themselves erotically attracted to the girl. Lord de Winter, the girls' true father and their mystery benefactor, learns of her identity and has her set free. Kathleen escapes into the arms of a local painter, Brian de Quincey, but is recaptured by Captain Renfield who has fallen head over heels in lust for her. Soon, however, both he and Kathleen are captured by Lord de Winter's men. This time both of them are tortured. However, in the meantime the Devil has taken a shine to quiet virtuous Margaret; she has anal sex with him and becomes a true witch. After seducing the Mother Superior and driving her to suicide, she runs into the countryside and sets about avenging both her innocent sister and her mother. Margaret and de Quincey team up and gain entrance to the castle by subterfuge to rescue Kathleen and bring down the curse on their enemies. Meanwhile, Lord de Winter and de Quincey are in league, planning to aid the approaching William of Orange in his challenge to the throne of Charles II (sic). Margaret gives Lady de Winter a nasty shock during a lesbian clinch, and everything comes to a head with a sword fight and a confrontation between Kathleen and Margaret...

**Production notes:** Probably filmed in early May 1972 after the April completion of *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein*, with which it shares numerous locations and cast members, *The Demons* depicts medieval witchfinder shenanigans with a distinctly 1970s twist...

**Review:** This fast-paced and eventful movie about two sisters accused of witchcraft manages to maintain one's interest even in its longer incarnations (see 'Other versions'). There are plentiful narrative twists and unexpected developments, a few reasonably convincing performances (and many more hilarious ones), lots of extras to make the crowd scenes more lavish, and lashings of gratuitous nudity. The witch-torturing scenes are lively and sometimes gratifyingly unpleasant (although some steam during the water-scalding scene would have helped things along a bit), and the frequent softcore sex is briskly embedded into the plot. To cap it all, the story takes place in some of Franco's loveliest Portuguese settings, so if you get tired of all the screaming and screwing you can soak up the scenery and enjoy the sumptuous costumes. All in all, this is a film I would consider showing to a non-Franco fan

with a taste for Euro-horror, because it avoids the languor that can alienate the uninitiated and delivers the exploitation goodies throughout.

Thematically however, should you care to get serious, *The Demons* is at six-six-sixes and sevens. Franco muddies the waters of what seems at first to be a straightforward anti-Catholic tale by adding a perverse, ill-fitting twist – witchcraft actually works! There's no doubt about it, no question of it being a delusion in the minds of superstitious villagers or a paranoid thorn lodged in the repressed libidos of the witch-hunters: it's a genuine force that can kill. In the most triumphant demonstration of this, a witch's kiss turns a man into a skeleton in front of an entire village. No ambiguity there! The Catholic torturers remain vile, self-serving hypocrites, but it would seem they're not entirely deluded in their beliefs. Satan exists, witches can kill. Of course, this makes the notion of 'evil' in the film hard to fathom. Franco would certainly never opt for the least appetising of outcomes, burgeoning sexuality as evil. This is why, of our two leading ladies, pious Margaret turns out to be the real witch, not her nature-loving, nudity-embracing sister.

But are witches really evil in this world we're witnessing? We must assume so, as Margaret, for all her piety and righteousness earlier, is visited in her chamber by a good-looking young man clad in red stretch fabric, claiming to be Satan, who plunders her immortal soul by screwing her up the ass. "*The righteous are often wicked*" he says, demonstrating the talent for sophistry that makes Lucifer so dangerous. If the righteous are often wicked, the wicked must often be good. To maintain the cosmic balance, or something. This upside-down morality is a bit too freaky for new-age pagan Kathleen, who rushes to the village square to denounce her sister as a real live honest-to-goodness witch; the bad sort, obviously. ("Oh no! You can't mean you think I might be a witch? You can't be serious!") says poor Margaret, her choice of words, I'm sure you'll agree, giving her tearful protest that extra bit of olde world charm.) Granted, Kathleen is primarily motivated by vengeance for the murder of her lover, Renfield, although you find yourself asking what happened to her feelings for the man who saved her from the witch-hunters earlier, sensitive Brian de Quincey, played by handsome young Andrés Monales? She forgets all about him, which is a bit implausible when you consider that thanks to Renfield, played by a tubby Albert Dalbés, she ended up being tortured again. But there's more to Kathleen's betrayal than sibling jealousy and poor taste in men: she seems *repulsed* by her sister, and angry that she's a 'real' witch. A sympathetic character for most of the film, Kathleen loses our goodwill at the end, denouncing her own flesh and blood to the wicked aristocrats then watching her burn in the village square. As so often in Franco's cinema, normal filmmaking virtues such as 'coherent characterisation', 'thematic unity' and 'viewer identification' are pushed aside by whatever gleefully reckless idea flits through his head.

**Cast and crew:** Among the usual suspects (Vernon, Dalbés, Libert, Monales, Nichols), the most prominent new face is



Cihangir Gaffari, aka 'John Foster', who plays Judge Jeffreys. This French-born Iranian actor racked up around thirty films in Iranian and Turkish productions before turning up in Spain and working for Franco, Raúl Artigot (*The Witch's Mountain*, 1972), and Fernando Merino (*Dick Turpin*, 1974). In the 1980s he turned to film production, producing and starring in two films by the American exploitation director Matt Cimber: a 'feminist' sword-and-sorcery film called *Hundra* (1983), and the 'female Indiana Jones' adventure *Yellow Hair and the Fortress of Gold* (1984).

**Music:** It's funny that *The Demons* is often criticised for its anachronistic use of psychedelic rock and jazz, as if the melodramatic string arrangements common in Hammer horror films are any more appropriate to the 1600s. Franco himself gave an interview deploring the score, claiming that he was unable to attend post-production due to other commitments (such as making five more films that year). Whilst it's true that he didn't have a personal hand in choosing the music (the selections were made by sound editor and future director of French erotica Gérard Kikoïne), it's a shame he seems to have been put on the back foot by criticism, because the score is actually quite enthralling. It's a riot of flailing bongos and soprano saxophone, underpinned by furious wacka-wah guitar summoning a contained rhythmic frenzy that resembles nothing so much as the Can song 'Pinch' from the album *Ege Bamyasi* (recorded the same year, 1972). To my ears it's the perfect accompaniment to the film's delirious mishmash of historical drama and psychedelic sexploitation ... The original 1972 version of the film utilises virtually every track from Jean-Michel Lorgere's classic library LP *Traffic Pop*. They are: 'Procession' (the pre-credits torture scene); 'Scenic Railway' (the credits); 'Strange Night' (Kathleen's masturbation scene); 'Crescendo City' (Mother Rosalinda writhing; Lady de Winter and Captain Renfield's sex scene; Mother Rosalinda seduced by Margaret); 'Furia' (Margaret screwed by the Devil); 'Demencia' (Margaret's mother appearing to her from beyond the grave); 'Witches' (the witch's house); 'Runway' (the swordfighters rescuing Lord de Winter and de Quincey); and 'Traffic Light' (for Mrs. de Winter's scene with Britt Nichols). A controversial 'director's cut' assembled in 2003 substitutes some of the original music with material derived from later Franco films such as *Frauen-gefangnis*.

**Locations:** As mentioned, *The Demons* benefits from stunning location work throughout, from the Castle of Santa Barbara in Alicante to the Conde de Castro Guimarães Palace in Cascais, Portugal. The Castle of Santa Barbara's stone hallway (see 99 *Women*; *El muerto hace las maletas*) is used often, and we get another glimpse of the sea cove that lies at the rear of the Conde de Castro Guimarães Palace, as seen in *Dracula's Daughter* and *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein*. Apart from a brief scene at a Tudor-style cottage and farmyard (which can also be seen in the following *Un capitán de quince años*), the architecture is mostly wrong for medieval England, but a delight nonetheless. Further shooting took place in Sintra, Portugal, just a few miles away from Cascais.

**UK theatrical release:** Submitted to the BBFC on the 23rd March 1972, *The Demons* was rejected outright for cinema distribution. However, the film subsequently played in various cinema clubs around the country. It appeared in the Cinecenta Tottenham Court Road in May 1973, and toured provincial sex cinemas such as Birmingham Comptons and The Bradford Penthouse, on a double-bill with John Hayes' downbeat sex melodrama *The Hang Up* in June. By December it was back in London, at the Compton Club in Soho. The film finally made its way onto UK DVD in 2008, when Redemption Films submitted a 100m50s version called *Las poseidas del demonio* which was passed without cuts.

**Connections:** Despite the title, *The Demons* is not a response to Ken Russell's *The Devils* (though Russell's possessed nuns were cavorting through European cinemas at the time) but a retooling of Franco's earlier witch-hunting extravaganza, *The Bloody Judge*. It must be said, however, that Cihangir Gaffari's Judge Jeffreys is no match for Christopher Lee's, despite being given killer lines of dialogue like "Come to me Kathleen; show me what witches do..." and "A woman's weeping is like a melodious modulation. Both touch my sensibilities, and stir my spirit and my blood to weaken me." Foster's version of the character may be less imposing than Lee's, but he's also much less squeamish, hanging around in the dungeon just for fun to watch Renfield being burned with red-hot tongs ... Unlike *The Bloody Judge*, where Franco and co-writer Harry Alan Towers had evidently done their homework, British history gets mangled here. The real William of Orange arrived by sea to depose King James II, not his predecessor Charles II ... *The Demons* borrows some plot threads from *Justine*: both stories involve two sisters, one virtuous, one sluttish, forced to leave a convent, with the virtuous girl finding succour in the arms of a sensitive painter ... Alberto Dalbés plays a character called 'Renfield', although fly-eating and vampire worship are conspicuously absent.

**Other versions:** The longest available variant, running to 118m, is Redemption Films' 2014 Blu-ray release, which appears to have clinched the claim to be the complete unexpurgated version, usurping a previous 113-minute outing – the so-called 'producer's cut' – released on DVD in Germany by X-rated Kult as *Die Nonnen von Clichy*. The latter came as a lavish two-disc set that also included the 'director's cut' (103m) and the German theatrical version, running to a relatively lean 85m. As with the same company's 2003 release of *Dracula's Daughter*, newly generated onscreen credits for both the producer's and director's cuts ignore the original production companies (in this case the French CFFP and the Portuguese Interfilme). Instead, they credit Arturo Marcos Tejedor's two Spanish companies, Marte Films and Cooperativa Fénix Films. Marte Films were financially involved with this 2003 DVD (likewise *Dracula's Daughter*); they are listed as copyright holders of the new versions. See *Dracula's Daughter* for speculation as to why Cooperativa Fénix Films may have been mentioned.

**Problematica:** In the French dub, Anne Libert's character is called 'Katrine' and Britt Nichols' character 'Marguerite'.



## UN CAPITÁN DE QUINCE AÑOS

*A Fifteen Year Old Captain*

**Spain & France 1972**

French visa number: 40135

*Original theatrical title in country of origin*

**Un capitaine de quinze ans** (FR) *A Fifteen Year Old Captain*

**Un capitán de quince años** (SP) *A Fifteen Year Old Captain*

*Alternative titles*

**Un capitaine de 15 ans** (FR poster with different spelling)

**Un capitán de 15 años** (SP poster with different spelling)

**Căpitan la 15 ani** (ROM theatrical)

**Un capitano di 15 anni** (IT theatrical)

**Un capitano di quindici anni** (IT alt. theatrical)

**Een Kapitein van Vijftien Jaar** (NL theatrical)

**Capitaine de 15 ans** (FR video cover)

**Een Kapitein Van 15 Jaar** (NL video)

**Kapitein Van 15 Jaar** (NL video cover)

*Production companies*

**Cooperativa Fénix Film** (Madrid)

**Comptoir Français du Film Production** (Paris)

*Theatrical distributors*

**Chamartín Producciones y Distribuciones** (Madrid)

**Comptoir Français du Film Production** (Paris)

*Timeline*

Shooting date	June	1972
French visa issued	09 February	1973
France	24 May	1973
Italy (Russoleno)	06 July	1974
Madrid	08 July	1974
Rome	01 December	1974

*Theatrical running time*

Spain	94m
France	93m

**Cast:** **José Manuel Marcos** (Dick Sands). **Edmund Purdom** (Admiral Marlowe, Dick's godfather). **William Berger** (Negoro). **Marc Cassot** (Captain Hull). **Sergio Mendizábal** (Professor Benedict). **Alberto Dalbés** (Vargas, a slave trader). **Doris Thomas** (Clara Marlowe). **Fernando Bilbao** (Hercules, shipwreck survivor). **Howard Vernon** (Harris, a botanist). **Marisol Delgado** (Nan, Clara's maid). **Armand Mestral** (Korda, Negoro's associate). **Gonzalo Cañas** (Bat, goateed shipwreck survivor). **Luis Barboo** (crew member with red hat). **F. Teixeira**.

**Credits:** directed by **Jess Franco**. screenplay by **Jess Franco**, **José Antonio Arévalo & Gonzalo Cañas**; based on the novel by **Jules Verne**. adaptation: **Jess Franco** [FR prints]. dialogue: **Elizabeth Ledu de Nesle** [FR prints]. director of photography: **Paul Souvêstre**. editor: **Roberto Fandiño**. set dresser: **Jean d'Eaubonne**. music: **Bruno Nicolai**, **David Khune**. producer: **Arturo Marcos Tejedor**. presented by [i.e. French co-producer]: **Robert de Nesle** [FR prints]. production manager: **Robert de Nesle** [SP prints]. unit manager: **Claude Pessis**. assistant producer: **Luis Ocaña**. production secretary: **Fernande Meunier** [FR prints]. assistant director: **José Antonio Arévalo** [SP prints] / **Alberto Prous** [FR prints]. continuity: **Nicole Guettard**. 2nd unit camera operator: **Javier Pérez Zofio**. camera assistant: **Alberto Prous**. still photography: **Christian Hart** [SP prints] / **Howard Vernon** [as 'Mario Lippert'] [FR prints]. location manager: **F. Garcí-Nuño**. special effects: **Manuel Baquero**. make-up: **Manuela García**. assistant editor: **Gérard Kikoïne** [FR prints]. colour: **Eastmancolor**. film stock: **Kodak Eastmancolor**. laboratories: **G.T.C.** (Joinville-le-Pont) & **Fotofilm Madrid**, **S.A.**. sound technician: **Jesús Jiménez**. sound effects: **Luis Castro**. sound re-recording: **Cinearte, S.A.** [SP prints] / **Studios Marcadet** [FR prints]. wardrobe: **Peris Hermanos & Araoris**.

**Synopsis:** *19th Century England. 15-year-old Dick Sands dreams of becoming a great sailor like his godfather, Admiral Marlowe. Marlowe agrees to secure Dick a job as cabin-boy on 'The Pilgrim', a sailing ship commanded by his friend Captain Hull. En route the ship stops to pick up the Admiral's wife Clara and a party of her friends who are travelling to America. Also joining the crew is Professor Benedict, an entomologist, and Negoro, a sailor whom Dick regards with suspicion. A few days into their journey they see what appears to be an abandoned ship. Climbing aboard, Captain Hull and his men find three sailors, Hercules, Bat and Tom, in the hold. They are almost dead from lack of water. They are brought back to the Pilgrim and nursed back to health. Not long after, Hull and many of his crew are killed during a whale hunt, leaving young Dick to captain the ship. The shifty Negoro, a slaver posing as a cook, damages the sextant and during a storm the ship founders off a lush tropical coast. The survivors are Dick, Clara, Clara's maid, Negoro, Benedict, Hercules, Bat and Tom. On the beach they encounter a man called Harris, who claims to be a doctor studying the local flora and says the seafarers have arrived in Brazil. He is in fact a slaver like Negoro, and the true location is West Africa. Negoro and Harris arrange an ambush of the survivors: Negoro intends to demand a ransom for the return of Clara, Dick and Professor Benedict, and Harris is to sell the others as slaves. Dick manages to escape with the help of Hercules, but Negoro still has Clara and the Professor hidden away. The resourceful teenager must try to find and rescue his friends before they are murdered or sold into slavery.*

**Review:** One of the more unusual directorial choices Franco made in the early seventies is this children's adventure film, based on one of the lesser known Jules Verne novels. Rather like the Jack London

adaptations made by Italian gore maestro Lucio Fulci around the same time (*White Fang* and *The Challenge to White Fang*), it's a straight up slice of action adventure from a director one would never associate with children's material. Unlike the Fulci films, however, *Un capitán de quince años* does not chew at the matinée leash with displays of graphic violence, nor did it prove a profitable sideline for its director.

*Un capitán de quince años* is the sort of movie whose ideal home is Saturday morning television (indeed, the film often played this slot on Spanish TV in the 1980s and 90s). Despite a limited budget it manages to maintain some dignity as a plausible adventure story, with attractive location shooting and the use of a beautiful old sailing ship to bolster the period illusion. The 'boy's own' fantasy sees plucky Dick Sands take charge of a ship whose captain has been killed; the young hero's seafaring abilities mean he's better suited to the top job than the landlubbers who make up the rest of the passenger-list. The film's young star, José Manuel Marcos (son of Cooperativa Fénix Films boss Arturo Marcos) is a vigorous and likeable presence, perhaps a tad too old for the role but naive and energetic enough to make a go of it (it's something of a surprise that he appears never to have acted again, although he did apparently begin a second film for Franco). Reliable ballast is provided by Howard Vernon as the cheerful but shifty Harris, who claims to be "a doctor seeking medicinal plants", while deporting himself like a man who's probably smoked a few. Edmund Purdom, on the other hand, is capable but unremarkable in his role, and never seems to relish the material. The remainder of the cast likewise maintain a professional level of mediocrity, and to be honest, so does Franco the director. He takes a staunchly conventional approach throughout, proving that he's always capable of helming 'normal' productions; capable, if truth be told, of being ordinary. That said, the film has a certain amount of poise within its limited ambitions. Even a storm at sea, rendered on a budget that no doubt barely covered the film stock, just about succeeds thanks to some energetic editing and imaginative choice of camera angles. The meagre bucketfuls of seawater splashed over the cast may provoke derision from some viewers but, generally speaking, the fantasy world of *Un capitán de quince años* stays afloat.

Franco tinkers with the ending of Verne's original tale to conclude on a surprisingly downbeat note. Consequently, Dick's final speech to his revered godfather is heavy with tragic irony: "It gives me such a strange feeling. I get chills all over ... When you appear on the bridge, with the crew in their proper positions, the blood clots in my veins. You seem like a King, as if you had the whole world in your hand. Do you think one day I could be an Admiral, and the sailors on deck will stand to attention for me?" Young Dick finally gets his wish, but it's not quite what he had in mind...

For all the derring-do Franco demonstrates by attempting all of this on a paltry Robert de Nesle budget, it has to be said that the result is a rather old-fashioned adventure yarn that doesn't show Franco in his best light. It's really of passing interest only.

**Music:** The title theme from *Devil's Island Lovers* is recycled, and there's another outing for the lush, strident theme from *Justine* which Franco had already plundered for *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein*.

**Locations:** Shot in four weeks on location in Portugal, the island of Madeira and the Canary Islands, with further material filmed in Alicante and Murcia (Spain).

**Connections:** Jules Verne's novel, published in 1878, raised the contentious issue of slavery, and the even more contentious issue of Africans' complicity in the financial exploitation of their own people; Franco's adaptation steers clear of such thorny matters ... Verne may have based *Un capitaine de quinze ans* on an adventure in his own youth; according to Verne scholars Ariel Pérez, Garnt de Vries and Jean-Michel Margot, "It has been said for a long time now that when he was a boy, Verne bought a place on the three-mast *Coralie*, so he could go to the Indies just to get his cousin Caroline, with whom he was in love, a coral necklace. This story was first presented by Marguerite Allotte de la Fitiye in her biography about the French author. Recently, it has been discovered the story was fake. All the details she gave are impossible. Besides, she described two contradictory versions of the story. There may, however, be some truth in this legend, since Volker Dehs quotes a source from 1909, Paul Eudel, who told that at the age of 11, young Jules once took a small boat and tried to catch up with the *Octavie*, en route for the Indies." ... Franco's adaptation bookends the story with new material relating to Dick's godfather Admiral Marlowe; in the original story Dick is a foundling working as a cabin boy, not the ward of a rich naval officer ... Edmond Purdom and William Berger went on to appear alongside each other in Franco's *Los ojos siniestros del Doctor Orloff* (1973) ... It would be more than a decade before Franco attempted a family-friendly film again: see the very bizarre *En busca del dragón dorado* (1983).

**Other versions:** The French-language Dutch video release edits out the scene in which Dick stabs Harris to death, rendering the encounter totally senseless. Fortunately the scene is intact in the Spanish DVD release from Suevia Films. Likewise, when Negro throws the knife that pierces Dick, the actual knife-throwing is missing from the Dutch video but present in the Spanish DVD. Perhaps the video version was a made-for-TV edit? *Obsession* lists the original running time as 105m, while the Spanish Ministry of Culture lists the running time of the Spanish theatrical version as 94 minutes. Allowing for the faster speed of PAL tapes, the Dutch video is taken from a French theatrical print that runs 88m40s, so at least six minutes are missing. However, the Suevia Films DVD also runs 88 minutes, so it's possible there's a significantly longer cut which remains to be seen on any home entertainment formats.

**Press coverage:** Franco received extraordinary praise for *Un capitán de quince años* from ABC Madrid's reviewer: "Premieres in continuous session rooms and double bills tend not to be brought to these critical pages, in that silence can be considered most of the time a negative judgment of value. Naturally, though not always, silences sometimes occur against the will of the critic for reasons of 'force majeure' [...] However,

an exception is made, but only this time, in favour of the film that Franco has managed to make on a topic so rich in materials and therefore so difficult, as the unforgettable novel by Jules Verne 'A Captain at Fifteen' ... Verne's novels used to feature extremely heavy passages calling for enormous willpower for the young reader not to skip, but, in spite of which, were bewitching stimulus for the imagination. The young reader 'saw' in the pages of each story a wonderful, exotic world full of unusual events and miracles that sprouted from the words to become mental images. Jesús Franco has found the equivalent of that game of metaphors. This is what to me is extraordinary in his art as director, and what drives me to dedicate this space to his film. Replacing the image with its allusion is difficult and risky in cinema, since cinema is essentially image. With admirable ease, Franco narrates scenes in which what is narrated is not there, but it is meaningful, alluded to, and asks to be completed imaginatively by the viewer."<sup>2</sup>

## UN SILENCIO DE TUMBA

*A Silent Tomb*

**Spain 1972**

Spanish depósito légal number: M-29598-72

*Production company*

**Films Manacoa P.C.** (Madrid)

*Theatrical distributors*

**Bilbaina Films** (Bilbao)

*Timeline*

Shooting	Autumn	1972
Madrid	21 December	1976

*Theatrical running time*

Spain	83m
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*Cast:* **Glenda Allen** (Annette Lamark). **Alberto Dalbés** (Juan Ribas). **Yelena Samarina** (Vera Steiner). **Luis Induni** (Jerome Weber). **Mario Álex** (Vincent Durban). **Manuel Pereiro** (Bongó). **Kali Hansa** (Laura, the maid). **Francisco Acosta** [as 'Gene Harris'] (Jean-Paul). **Montserrat Prous** (Valerie Lamark). *uncredited:* **Caroline Rivière** (Jerome's girlfriend).

*Credits:* directed by **Jess Franco**. based on the novel "Un silencio de tumba" by **Enrique Jarnes Bergua**, screen adaptation by **Jess Franco**. director of photography: **Javier Pérez Zofio**. editor: **Roberto Fandiño**. art director & set dressing: **José Massague**. music: **David Kuhne**, **Fernando García Morcillo**.

producer: **Jess Franco**. production manager: **Antonio Cervera García**. assistant production: **Isidro Prous**. assistant director: **Francisco Nuño**. continuity: **Emmy [Emilia] Arnau**. camera operator: **Alberto Prous**. camera assistant: **Juan A. Prous**. still photography: **Maximo López Piedra**. property master: **Andrés Santana**. make-up: **Carmen Menchaca**. assistant make-up: **Elena Cervera de la Torre**. assistant editor: **Miguel Ángel Barbero**. filmed in **Techniscope**. laboratory: **Fotofilm Madrid S.A.**. colour: **Eastmancolor**. sound recording: **Cinearte S.A.**. lighting: **Hermanos Medina**. "Our thanks to the authorities and people of Calpe & Altea (Alicante) for their cooperation in the making of this film."

**Synopsis:** Fresh from an arduous film shoot on a Western, 'Strangers in Keerbergen', Annette Lamark, an actress who's recently hit the big time, takes a group of film industry acquaintances – producer Jerome Weber and his girlfriend, Vincent Durban (a lawyer working for Weber), Vera Steiner (a photographer) and Juan Ribas (a detective) – to her home on a desolate Spanish island. Accompanying the group is scriptwriter Jean-Paul, who is Annette's ex-lover and the father of her young son, Christian. The child is cared for on the island by Annette's sister Valerie and two servants, Laura and Bongó. Valerie hates her sister passionately; she's jealous of her beauty and success, judgemental of her friends and lifestyle, and feels she does little to care for the child. One of the guests, Vincent, wants to marry Annette, but says he doesn't want to get saddled with a stepson. Various possibilities are suggested, with Jerome concerned that looking after a child will harm Annette's career, and Jean-Paul angrily declaring that he refuses to allow Christian to be cared for by another man. Valerie is furious with the group for treating the child like an object to be owned or discarded; she feels that she is the only one who really cares about him and threatens murder if anyone takes the child away. In the middle of the night Christian is kidnapped and the kidnapper demands two million pesos. If anyone contacts the police, the child will be killed. Juan, Valerie's friend, reasons that the kidnapper must be one of the current guests because the dogs did not bark at an intruder during the night. The next morning Valerie and Vincent leave the island by a small motorboat to obtain the ransom money from a bank on the mainland. As Valerie tries to solve the mystery and find the boy, the assembled guests are picked off by a killer. First is Vincent, blown up by explosives in the motorboat, then Laura, stabbed through the throat, then Vera, hanged from a light fitting. Annette is stabbed, and Jean-Paul too. It turns out that Vincent is not dead after all; he has arranged the murderous weekend to get back at the people who conned his son out of money for their business and against Annette who seduced him purely for his money. Christian is safely in the hands of Bongó, the servant. Juan declares his love for Valerie, revealing that he is not a detective but a psychiatrist whom Annette asked to keep an eye on her sister. Valerie, Juan and Christian leave the island together.

**Production notes:** An application for authorisation to shoot was made for *Silencio de tumba* on 17 November 1972, which suggests that it was slotted in just before Franco and his crew headed



off to Las Palmas to shoot *Les Ébranlées* and *Sinner: Diary of a Nymphomaniac*. The film marked the birth of Franco's production company, Films Manacoa P.C. (the name was drawn from an episode of the Spanish comic strip *Anacieto, agent secreto* by Manuel Vazquez, who appeared in a guest role as a police sketch artist in *The Awful Dr. Orloff*). Manacoa was set up with the assistance of Antonio Cervera, Franco's production manager on *Silencio de tumba* and two further productions, *The Sinister Eyes of Dr. Orloff* and *Night of the Skull*. Cervera's only other credits were as production manager on two Paul Naschy vehicles, *Frankenstein's Bloody Terror* (1968) and *Los crímenes de Petiot* (1972). To Franco, who was constantly seeking production backing across the length and breadth of Europe, setting up his own production company must have made a lot of sense. The plan was to launch with three films featuring Montserrat Prous, but only one of these, *Un silencio de tumba*, was ever made under the Manacoa heading. *Un silencio de tumba* remained on the shelf for four years before securing a handful of Spanish playdates, turning up second on the bill to various releases in 1976, including René Cardona's *Survive*.

**Review:** A truly terrible contribution to the 'ten little indians' giallo format, *Un silencio de tumba* sees Franco for some reason unable to enliven the material. When Italian giallo maestro Mario Bava found himself stuck with a similarly boring script in *Five Dolls for an August Moon* (almost a blueprint for *Un silencio de tumba*), he alleviated the stock situations with exuberant eruptions of style for its own sake. Franco probably made *Un silencio de tumba* for a quarter of the money even the underfunded Bava could muster, but I'm afraid it is lack of inspiration, rather than a limited budget, which drags this effort down. Even the cheapest Franco films usually have *something* to offer the dedicated viewer; this is one of the (thankfully rare) instances in which there's nothing at all to nourish our attention. Other than a few eccentricities on the soundtrack, there's little to suggest it was made by the same man who created marvels like *Vampyros Lesbos* or *Succubus*.

*Un silencio de tumba* is composed of 99% chatter, 1% murder, and 0% sex – hardly the formula that made, say, the Italian giallo such a saleable commodity abroad. Unusually for Franco, even the locations are boring, which is a real problem in a film which consists mainly of groups of people standing around rabbiting incessantly. Amid the humdrum action, one character even slips away from the island without being noticed; she simply walks out, hitches a ride on a boat, and disappears from the plot! To make the scene even more perplexing, this unnamed, unmissed character is played by Franco's own step-daughter, Caroline Rivière! Maybe she had a row with her step-father? If so, I can see why...

Structurally this is one hell of a half-hearted, lackadaisical piece of work. Exposition is clumsily info-dumped using a voice-over from the bitter and jealous Valerie, who helpfully names all the visitors and explains their relations to one another during the interminable first-reel party scene. According to Valerie, the

number one crime of the characters is selfishness; Vincent wants to marry Annette but he doesn't want to look after her child, Annette herself spends very little time with the boy and palms him off onto her sister. However, for the story to ignite we could do with a few really vivid sins for the killer to punish; instead, apart from what we hear about their past activities (financial finagling mostly), we're asked to find Annette's friends contemptible because they play party music too loud and wake up little Christian; hardly the most monstrous behaviour in the wicked world of the giallo, where rape, molestation, murder and blackmail are the norm! To make matters worse, the final act simply falls apart; in a development that makes absolutely no sense whatsoever it's revealed that little Christian has been taken by Bongó, the benevolent family servant, and kept safely away from the house. Is he an accessory to the killer's plan? No; it would seem that the child's disappearance and the murder plot just happen to occur simultaneously! This cannot be called a 'twist', it's simply nonsense. All the motivations are unbelievable and characters lazily conceived; the murderer, supposedly a decent sort really, admits that Valerie is "*the only decent person in this shithole*" but has no hesitation in trying to kill her too. Bongó is depicted as a kindly old lunatic, but surely by demanding a ransom and terrorising Valerie he's lost any claim to our sympathy? Meanwhile, everything is dragged down further by the character of Valerie herself, who spends the whole film either crying or righteously criticising everyone.

*Un silencio de tumba* was never translated into English for foreign sales, and no wonder; in a world market where violent, inventive thrillers by Dario Argento, Lucio Fulci, Umberto Lenzi and Sergio Martino were on offer, who would want to distribute something as lacklustre and derivative as this? The murders are banal, there's nothing in the way of eroticism, the camerawork is conventional, and as thrillers go, well, a blancmange could teach it a thing or two about suspense. A strong contender for Jess Franco's dullest film, literally the only exciting thing about this whole package is the wonderful Spanish poster.

**Cast and crew:** Cameraman Javier Pérez Zofio first worked for Franco as a camera operator on *Justine* and *Count Dracula*. He went on to shoot Franco's *Night of the Skull* (1973) and *Killer Barbys* (1996). His other work included camera operator credits on three Paul Naschy films: León Klimovsky's *Werewolf Shadow* (1971), Carlos Aured's *Horror Rises from the Tomb* (1973) and Klimovsky's *Devil's Possessed* (1974).

**Music:** The music, especially the mournful and disconsolate 'Girl from Ipanema' rip-off that plays over the credits, is the only element worth celebrating. There's some avant-garde scraping of piano innards to enliven a few scenes, and a very curious piece for organ and hi-hat that sounds like something David Lynch might have used to score nefarious goings-on in *Twin Peaks*.

**Locations:** The rocky outcrop of Peñón de Ifach in Calpe is glimpsed in one shot; the rest of the story was filmed in Altea, along the coast between Calpe and Alicante.

**Connections:** *Un silencio de tumba* is allegedly based on a novel of the same name by Enrique Jarnés Bergua (aka 'Eirik Jarber' and 'Henry Jarnés Berger'). Born in Cascante in 1919, Bergua is perhaps best known in Spain for adapting the adventures of Dan Dare for Spanish radio, as *Diego Valor, Pilot of the Future*, which racked up over 1200 episodes in five years ... The ransom for the return of Christian is delivered from the 'Bank of Manacoa', a reference to Franco's production company, so did *Un silencio de tumba* enter production on a promise of money from another producer, with Franco forced to stump up the cash when they dropped out? If so it would make sense of an otherwise pointless in-joke ... According to *The Manacoa Files*, when Jerome (Induni) refers to a film called 'Dracula contra Sartana' Franco was incorporating an idea recently suggested to him in all seriousness by an Italian producer! ... The plot utilises an idea from Arthur Conan Doyle's 'Sherlock Holmes' story "Silver Blaze", specifically the much quoted "curious incident of the dog in the night-time".

**Other versions:** Nude stills have been found featuring Montserrat Prous and Alberto Dalbés, but there is no trace of a nude scene in the version released on Spanish video. Either they were trimmed for video, shot for an as-yet unseen export version, or they never made the original cut.

#### Timeline

Shooting date	20 Nov - 08 Dec	1972
French visa issued	03 October	1973
France	04 October	1973
Belgium (Brussels)	28 February	1974
UK 'X' issued? [see Appendix]	03 July	1974

#### Theatrical running time

France (CNC listing)	68m
UK	80m51s (see Appendix)

**Cast:** **Anne Libert** (Benny). **Doris Thomas** (Berthe). **Howard Vernon** (Al Pereira). **Montserrat Prous** (Valentina). *French poster adds:* **Kali Hansa** (Leona). *uncredited:* **Glenda Allen** (Lina Gordon). **Manuel Pereiro** (Emile Kallman). **Jess Franco** ('House of Vice' client).

**Credits:** director: **Jess Franco**. screenplay & adaptation: **Jess Franco Manera**. dialogue: **Elisabeth Ledu de Nesle**. director of photography: **Gérard Brissaud**. editor: **Gérard Kikoïne**. music: **Daniel Janin**, **Robert Hermel**. presenter [i.e. producer]: **Robert de Nesle**. production secretary: **Fernande Meunier**. still photography: **Howard Vernon** [as 'Mario Lippert']. assistant editor: **Patrick Deconinck**. continuity: **Nicole Guettard**. sound recordist: **Michel Condo**. film stock: **Kodak Eastmancolor**. laboratory: **G.T.C.** (Joinville-le-Pont).

## LES ÉBRANLÉES

*The Shakers*

**France 1972**

French visa number: 40865

#### Alternative titles

**Les Ébranlées (la maison du vice)** (FR poster)

**La Maison du vice** (FR video)

**Maison du vice** (FR alt. video)

**Het Huis der Ondeugd** (BEL video-cover) *The House of Vice*

#### Unconfirmed titles

**Des Filles pour l'amour** (FR alt. [MF/OB]) *Girls for Loving*

**Vibrating Girls** (unspecified US title)

**Dolls for Sale** (possible export title - see Appendix)

**Doll's for Sale** [sic] (title logged by BBFC - see Appendix)

#### Production company

**Comptoir Français du Film Production** (Paris)

#### Theatrical distributors

**Comptoir Français du Film Production** (Paris)

**Cinecenta Film Distributors** (London)

**Synopsis:** *At the Flamingo strip club, private detective Al Pereira watches a woman perform nude on stage. Afterwards he grills her for information about a mysterious club called The House of Vice. The woman, whose name is Leona, pulls a gun on Pereira, blindfolds him, and drives him to the House of Vice where, still blindfolded, he is brought in front of four people – Lina Gordon, Benny, Berthe, and a man called Emile Kallman. They warn Pereira to stop poking his nose into their affairs. Berthe says that she will personally chop off his tongue, his arms, his nose and his genitals if he gives them any more trouble. After Pereira is released, he goes home and finds Lina Gordon naked in his bedroom. She offers him a lot of money if he will break into Kallman's apartment, steal a key, and retrieve a folder of pictures from a locked cabinet. Unaware that Lina is one of the House of Vice owners, he accepts, but during the robbery Kallman wakes up. Pereira knocks him unconscious and leaves, after which someone else enters and shoots Kallman dead with his own gun. Pereira hands the folder to Lina and, referring to the contents, asks to know more about "a certain Benjamin". Lina declines to answer, saying, "It's a long story". Next day, Pereira reads in the newspaper that he is being sought by the police for murder. Pereira turns to Valentina, a female friend who strips at another nightclub. She informs him that his client is Lina Gordon, owner of the Flamingo Club. Al forces his way into the club and encounters Leona and Benny. He demands to see Lina, who denies everything. She pulls a gun and tells him this is his last warning. Outside, Al is attacked by a couple of thugs. He sees Lina waiting for him in a car,*

and makes his escape. She says that Leona has fallen in love with her and that Kallman was blackmailing her over the photos. She no longer loves Leona and only wants her money. Pereira asks more questions but Lina says he must trust her, they can both profit from it. Later, Valentina tells him that Lina had refused to be Kallman's mistress. To find out more, Valentina goes to the Flamingo. Benny takes a fancy to her, and tells her she could make a lot of money at The House of Vice. As the two of them have sex, Pereira creeps in and steals a set of keys from Benny's purse. At the House of Vice, Benny introduces Valentina to Berthe and Leona, but Leona recognises her as a friend of the detective. Valentina is taken to 'The Red Room', stripped naked, and whipped by Leona while Berthe watches. Pereira uses the stolen keys to enter the Flamingo Club searching for clues but Leona and Benny discover him. Benny pistol-whips him unconscious but when they try to dump his body he fights back and escapes. Al goes to see Lina Gordon and tells her how much he's missed her. She tells him that Valentina has been abducted and gives him a gun. Leona is waiting and pulls a gun on him as he leaves, but Lina shoots her from the balcony. At the House of Vice, Pereira is too late to save Valentina, who dies under interrogation. He shoots Berthe dead in retaliation. In a house by the sea, Lina and Benny embrace. As they kiss, Lina produces a knife and stabs the other woman. Pereira arrives and the two of them make love next to the corpse. Lina says they are now free, and rich, but Pereira wants to know the final bit of the puzzle. "Who was Benjamin?" It transpires that the documents Lina asked Pereira to obtain contained evidence of her previous identity as a man, evidence Kallman was using as blackmail. Lina admits the truth to Pereira. Furious and disgusted, he shoots her.

**Production notes:** Having shot scenes for *Un capitán de quince años* around the Canary Islands, Franco returned soon afterwards to film *Les Ébranlées* and *Sinner: The Secret Diary of a Nymphomaniac*. These were made 'back-to-back' with *Les Ébranlées* going first, shooting for three weeks from 20 November 1972...

**Review:** *Les Ébranlées* is a grindingly downbeat sex drama featuring that "very private detective" Al Pereira, played here by a rumpled Howard Vernon as a bitter, washed up cynic, apt to take money for highly questionable work and no questions asked. As we meet him, Pereira is investigating links between the Flamingo strip club and 'La Maison du Vice', described as "a private clinic for perverts", whose clientele includes transsexuals, sadists, masochists, nymphomaniacs (and in one brief glimpse, Jess Franco). One of the more obscure titles from the director's early 1970s heyday, having never turned up in an English-language version, it's actually a grim little treasure, swathed in a moral and atmospheric darkness that pollutes even the supposed 'hero'. Only one character is untainted (Valentina, described by Pereira as "*The only decent woman I ever knew*"), and she ends up tortured to death; *Les Ébranlées* is thus one of the most nihilistic films of Franco's career.

We begin with a vigorous strip-club act from the ever-wonderful Kali Hansa, a performer who exudes wanton live-wire sexiness in everything she does. Her performance inaugurates one of the two

main elements that jostle for our attention in *Les Ébranlées*. While the convoluted plot is certainly engaging in its own right, it's no exaggeration to say that the strip show sequences are the commercial raison-d'être of the film. Fortunately, although they gobble up lots of celluloid, their variety, energy and eccentricity justify inclusion. We see four different stage shows at the Flamingo: Hansa's sexy gymnastics; some sex kitten posturing from Montserrat Prous, an athletic transvestite dance routine, and most memorably, a sequence in which Glenda Allen writhes around nude on the floor covered in stage blood before being stabbed in the chest by Hansa. The latter performance, lasting almost five minutes, is accompanied by a free-form composition for slide guitar, gongs and echoed percussion, and is observed by an audience consisting mainly of transvestites in dodgy wigs. Gory lesbian sex murder and atonal music served up to an audience of trannies? The Flamingo Club truly is one esoteric dive!

It must be said that *Les Ébranlées* is not as tightly constructed as its back-to-back sibling *Sinner*; for instance, Al Pereira is marched into the House of Vice up several flights of stairs on his way in, a process that is then repeated in its entirety on the way out. There's really no need for the repetition, which feels included purely to extend the rather meagre running time. Some of the plot twists are contrived and confusing; we never really believe in Lina's relationships with her cohorts at the sex club, and the characters seem to pop in and out of each other's homes willy-nilly, a problem exacerbated by the bland similarity of many of the interiors. One interior that does stand out though is 'The Red Room', a silver-foil swathed torture chamber in the House of Vice. The prolonged lesbian rape and beating of Valentina takes place there, six minutes of flagellation, ravishment and erotic menace filmed through a deep red filter. Franco supports the sadistic intensity of the scenario with a free-form tumble of clashing chords from the electric piano, creating an audio-visual delirium that will either suck you into his art-porn netherworld, or drive you out of the room with your hands over your ears and your teeth grinding in annoyance.

*Les Ébranlées* exudes waves of porno-land bleakness; it's like the come-down from a three-day bender caught on film. You've been flying high for weeks on a playboy holiday of cocaine and booze, but the money's run out, your head aches, and you find yourself walking the streets of a skanky red light district at six in the morning, with only the doorway drunks for company. That's *Les Ébranlées*, a film that manages to make the Canary Islands feel like Birmingham's red light district on a wet Tuesday morning. It's a sensation Franco obviously cultivated on purpose, because it's carried over into *Sinner* and recurs intact in *The Sadist of Notre Dame* seven years later. *Les Ébranlées* is certainly the least substantial of the three, lacking the emotional intelligence of *Sinner* and the voyeuristic excoriation of *Sadist*, but it compensates with a busy plot and a plethora of cynical characters and situations. The outcome is fantastically unpleasant: Pereira fails to save the life of Valentina, the stripper with a heart of gold who's been helping him





work the case. Lina, who's obsessed with taking him as her lover, reveals her secret past as a man, and in a seedy, depressing finale our 'hero' kills her. What's particularly unpleasant about this last detail is that Pereira doesn't shoot her because she's a crook or a murderess (in fact before her torrid revelation he has sex with her next to the corpse of a woman she's just murdered, which makes him by far the most callous and unprincipled 'Al Pereira' to be found in Franco's cinema). No, the reason he shoots her is simply because he feels disgusted because she turns out to be transsexual. The film ends on a long shot of Pereira doubled over on the beach, convulsed with despair, anger... or is it nausea?

**Franco on screen:** Franco appears as a customer at The House of Vice, as a voyeur, naturally, watching a couple having sex.

**Music:** The title theme, a funky little workout for electric piano, organ and hand-drum, is a kitsch treat that I've been unable to trace amid the library records of the period. The score is credited to Daniel Janin and Robert Hermel, although it also features Roger Davy's 'Rage Montante' (from the library album 'Sons nouveaux pour images contemporaines'), and 'Dragsters' by Jean-Bernard Raiteux (from the album 'Harlem Pop Trotters'). A piece for flute and echo effects anticipates the dominant musical elements of *How to Seduce a Virgin*, while the far-out improvisation for percussion and slide guitar accompanying Allen and Hansa's stage show uncannily anticipates Tobe Hooper and Wayne Bell's score for *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. Some of the electric piano improvisations were played by Franco himself.

**Locations:** The Canary Islands; chiefly the Hotel Santa Catalina in Las Palmas, Gran Canaria.

**UK theatrical release:** It's frustrating that no English-language print has yet surfaced, because the film was supposedly granted a BBFC 'X' Certificate on the 3rd July 1974 as *Dolls for Sale* (or 'Doll's for Sale' as written). However, there is reason to doubt this: see Appendix for more details.

**Connections:** *Les Ébranlées* depicts the perennial misfortunes of Al Pereira, one-time agent for Interpol (see *La muerte silba un blues* and *Attack of the Robots*), now apparently eking out a living as a private eye ... The subject of transsexuality recurs several times in Franco's work, most notably in *Pick-Up Girls* (1981) and *Las chicas del tanga* (1983). In both cases the context is far more positive than here ... Allen and Hansa's sado-sexual strip culminating in a faux-murder echoes *Succubus* and anticipates *Exorcism* ... An unconventional attitude to incest is voiced once again: Benny asks: "Why is it forbidden above all to sleep with your father?"

**Other versions:** The version available on PAL video from Videobox Belgium (running approximately 79m40s) is missing some footage, which may have been snipped due to print damage. Approximately forty-five minutes into the story, a softcore sex scene between Al Pereira and Lina Gordon jumps a groove and cuts to a later scene in the same room between Lina and Leona. The French video version is shorter, but reportedly contains a scene missing from the Belgian version.

## SINNER: THE SECRET DIARY OF A NYMPHOMANIAC

**France 1972**

French visa number: 40866

*Original theatrical title in country of origin*

**Le Journal intime d'une nymphomane** (FR) *Secret Diary of a Nymphomaniac*

*Alternative titles*

**Diary of a Nymphomaniac** (UK theatrical)

**Diary of a Nympho** (US theatrical)

**Les Inassouvies 77** (FR hardcore theatrical) *The Unsatiated 77*

**Diario íntimo de una ninfómana** (SP theatrical)

**Le giornate intime di una ninfomane** (IT theatrical - withdrawn)

**Le giornate intime di una giovane donna** (IT theatrical)

**Sinner** (UK video)

**Le Journal intime de Rosa** (shooting title [MF])

**Woman of Pleasure** (UK pre-release title - BBFC document)

*Production company*

**Comptoir Français du Film Production** (Paris)

*Theatrical distributors*

**Comptoir Français du Film Production** (Paris)

**New Realm/SF** (UK)

*Timeline*

Shooting	from 11 December	1972
France premiere	26 April	1973
French visa issued	04 May	1973
UK 'X' cert issued	09 January	1974
USA (Danville, VA)	14 March	1974
Portsmouth, UK	17 August	1974
Belgium (Brussels)	05 September	1974
Italian censor appeal lost	06 March	1975
Italy (Turin)	21 June	1976
Barcelona	15 June	1979
Madrid	17 July	1979
Seville	09 September	1979

*Theatrical running time*

France (CNC)	73m
Spain	86m
UK	76m02s

**Cast:** **Howard Vernon** (Linda's doctor). **Doris Thomas** (Ms. Schwartz, a photographer). **Anne Libert** (Countess Anna de Monterey). **Jacqueline Laurent** (Ruth Ortezt). **Montserrat Prous** (Linda Vargas). **Kali Hansa** [as 'Gaby Herman'] (Maria

Toledano, a stripper). **Francisco Acosta** [as 'Gene Harris'] (Paco, the Countess's lover). **Manuel Pereiro** (Mr. Orteze). *uncredited*: **Jess Franco** (Inspector Hernández). **Caroline Rivière** (seamstress and drug addict). **Yelena Samarina** (Angela, Paco's wife).

*Credits*: director: **Jess Franco**. screenplay by **Jess Franco**. adaptation & dialogue: **Elisabeth Ledu de Nesle**. director of photography: **Gérard Brissaud**. supervising editor: **Gérard Kikoïne**. music: **Jean Bernard Raiteux**, **Vladimir Cosma**. presenter [i.e. producer]: **Robert de Nesle**. continuity: **Nicole Guettard**. still photography: **Howard Vernon** [as 'Mario Lippert']. film stock: **Eastmancolor**. laboratory: **G.T.C.** (Joinville-le-Pont). music publisher: **Musique pour l'image**.

**Synopsis**: *Linda, a prostitute, commits suicide, but frames one of her customers, Orteze, for her murder. Orteze protests to his furious wife Ruth that he's innocent. Ruth decides to investigate Linda's background, and begins to piece together what really happened. Maria, one of Linda's friends, shows Ruth Linda's harrowing diary in which she recounted her bitter life experience. She had been raped by a man at a fairground soon after running away from home, and then again a few months later by the boss of a textile firm she worked for. Struggling to overcome her consequent aversion to men, she had fallen in love with Paco, a married man who professed to love her, but then rejected her when his wife Angela caught them together. Turning to the lesbian attentions of her friend the Countess Anna de Monterey, Linda became deeply upset when the older woman decided to go on vacation without her, which Linda saw as a further rejection. Getting involved in the porno industry, she met a lesbian photographer, Ms. Schwartz, and posed with Maria for nude photo-spreads. After being busted for pot, she was taken in by a doctor who tried to cure her of her emotional afflictions, which manifested as a form of nymphomania. When the doctor refused her sexual advances, Linda ran away. A while later, the doctor saw her in the street with a man and, assuming she'd become a prostitute, forced entrance to her apartment and raped her, claiming that he was extracting payment of her unpaid bill. Linda fell into deep depression and became just another lost soul in the city's red light district, until she was picked up by the man who'd first raped her - Orteze...*

**Production notes**: *Le Journal intime d'une nymphomane* followed immediately on from *Les Ébranlées*, shooting from 11 December 1972. Given that *Les Ébranlées*, the less complex of the two films, took three weeks to shoot, work on *Le Journal intime d'une nymphomane* probably extended into January 1973 (allowing for the inevitable disruption of the Christmas and New Year period).

**Review**: *Sinner: The Secret Diary of a Nymphomaniac* tells the story of Linda Vargas, whose teenage experience of sexual molestation propels her into a deadly spiral of drugs, prostitution and depression. It's one of Franco's most outstanding erotic dramas and deserves to be thought of as a kind of palimpsest for the other

sex films, be they frivolous, sleazy or disturbing. Franco, as always, is fascinated by beautiful women, especially beautiful women in live sex shows – here, though, his voyeurism takes account of the possibility that the girls cavorting onstage for the enjoyment of punters may be nursing terrible feelings of ennui, disappointment and betrayal. It is therefore one of Franco's most complex and emotionally mature films, and stands up well to repeated viewing.

The story is told elliptically, beginning with a perplexing scene in which Linda, a young prostitute, commits suicide in a way that deliberately frames a man called Orteze, whom we've just seen her pick up. From here we accompany Orteze's wife, Ruth, as she tries to make sense of what's happened. She's convinced her husband is no killer; so why would a suicidal hooker apparently frame him for murder? Ruth is adeptly played by Jacqueline Laurent as a repressed middle-class snob, initially unsympathetic to the prostitute whose death she perceives as having ruined her marriage. During her first encounter with Linda's friend the Countess Anna de Monterey, she disdainfully remarks, "I can't imagine there could be anything between you, a woman of refinement and breeding, and some cheap little streetwalker." It's this sort of attitude which Franco sets out to subvert: the film takes Ruth on a journey that will radically reshape her attitudes, puncture her prejudice, and inspire her to avenge Linda's suffering.

The true nature of the relationship between Linda and the man she framed for murder is revealed during a bravura flashback sequence to her teenage years, when she was sexually assaulted while visiting a fairground. The middle-aged attacker, whom we see trailing her through the streets in broad daylight, was Orteze. The molestation, which takes place on the ferris wheel, is brilliantly shot by Franco with a hand-held camera, perfectly capturing a cramped, unbearable encounter with a sleazeball who won't take no for an answer. The sound too is skilfully arranged, by editor Gérard Kikoïne, with a calliope swirling in and out of the mix, interspersed with a grinding rock riff and the insistent creaking of the ferris wheel. The fairground music, with its connotation of happy childhood, emphasises the girl's tender age, the cynically rotating rock riff plays the part of the aggressive male intruder, and the naturalistic creaks of the ferris wheel offset the delirium with harsh daylight reality. The truth of the assault emerges when Linda's friend Maria reads to Ruth from Linda's depressive and nihilistic diaries. By now the older woman has transcended middle-class propriety to empathize with the victim, and although the diary proves that her snivelling husband was innocent of murder, she can see that he propelled Linda to her doom as surely as if he'd slit her throat.

So despite its frequent nods to titillation, *Sinner* is essentially a morality tale. A compassionate script makes us care about the victim: there's no slavering Sadean enjoyment of Linda's demise, no siding with the monsters. As in the earlier *Nightmares Come at Night*, it's the flipside to films like *Justine* or *Eugenie... the Story of her Journey into Perversion* in that the principal character's suffering





above left: Linda (Montserrat Prous) discusses her treatment with an apparently gentle doctor (Howard Vernon). right: Linda poses for sexy photos with her friend Maria Toledano (Kali Hansa).  
below: Maria reads from the deceased Linda's diary, while Ruth Ortezt (Jacqueline Laurent) begins to understand how her husband caused a "cheap little streetwalker's" suicide.





is depicted without relish. What's important to Franco here is to explore how a girl can slide from innocent naivety to bitterness, and then further, into addiction and self destruction. Linda is ridden over by the cruel self-interest of others. No one really helps her; they just desire her. Her 'friends' are either here-today-gone-tomorrow drifters, or ships that pass in the night, for whom the pleasures of the flesh eclipse emotional awareness. There's a fatalism to the story, with no way out for the character, challenging us to ask how else the poor girl might reasonably be expected to react. Endless casual sex becomes a refuge from the hurt that life inflicts, and because Linda's emotional needs have been repeatedly spurned, exploited or disregarded, she comes to see physical sensations as the only currency worth exchanging, the only fun worth having, and the only hiding place from her ever-growing despair.

Which brings us to the diagnosis of 'nymphomania', the psychiatric validity of which is still contested today. In pornography, a so-called nymphomaniac is simply a male fantasy construct, a woman who's 'begging for it' and willing to spread her legs for even the tawdriest of 'dates'. In *Sinner*, however, the implications are darker. Here, a nymphomaniac is a woman whose appetite for sex has curdled into obsession and self-destructiveness. Linda suffers an awful variety of discordant emotional experiences, with the result that she turns to physical pleasure in desperation, unable to respond to tenderness or believe that she might find love. "When I'm depressed, as I often am, I think of an enormous erection, or the moist warm tongue of a young girl, and I feel better. When a beautiful little pussy opens up and grows moist, that's when we really live. Everything else is meaningless and dead," she writes in her diary. Linda's lusts are not criticised by the film; it's the way they come to replace a belief in friendship and love that makes them so sad. It's a downward spiral that culminates in one of the darkest sequences Franco has ever filmed. After she's arrested for possessing drugs, Linda is cared for by a doctor (Howard Vernon) who installs her in his private rest home. Realising she's still very young, he tries to break Linda's dependence on sex and narcotics. Because he refuses her offer of sexual favours we perceive him as a principled professional, the first really decent man Linda has met. Linda, however, is distraught: she begs for sexual comfort from the doctor and suffers an hysterical attack when he refuses. (Montserrat Prous really lets go in these scenes, giving vent to a fit of screaming despair that's the pinnacle of her tenure in Franco's films.) Linda's emotional alienation makes it impossible for her to feel comfort without sex, something the achingly melancholic musical theme by Roger Davy emphasises very powerfully at this point. Yet still Franco has not finished with the psychological descent of the character. Running away from the clinic, desperate for sex, she returns to the night-life. Soon after, the doctor sees her in the street with a man. Consumed by a fury of disgust, he accuses her of being a prostitute. To Linda's mute horror he then rapes her, demanding sex as 'payment' for her therapy. His brutish, scornful attitude, treating her as an object beyond the need for respect or compassion, is the final nail in the

coffin. "It was as if something inside me had broken. I trusted the doctor, I thought he'd save me, but he was like all the rest," Linda writes in her diary, adding, "Maybe it's my fault. Maybe I want all these things to happen, like a curse." Thus she turns the cruelty of others into a condemnation of herself; one last step on the road to suicide.

The depiction of women elsewhere in the film varies, although the roles are significantly marked by strength and self-will. "I hate wearing clothes!" says the stunning and playful Kali Hansa as she divests herself of her pantyhose. She plays Maria, one of the film's lighter creations: not too bright, but vivacious and energetic, the flipside of the darker roles, a girl who genuinely enjoys her work as a stripper. Doris Thomas's photographer Ms. Schwartz is a less successful creation, perhaps because she seems more of a wank-mag fantasy of a lesbo-porno photographer than a real person. Sexploitation decisions are taken here and there, but they're also sympathetic to the needs of the story, such as a lesbian scene between Ruth Orteza and Maria as they read Linda's diary. The intimacy has value in the narrative, both as mutual comforting (the two women have been reading about the suffering of another woman at the hands of various men) and also as Ruth's way of ensuring she gets to keep the diary, thus condemning her louse of a husband to prison. For me, the only tonal mis-step is a small detail during the Countess's voice-over, referring to her seduction of Linda: "Linda experienced an orgasm for the first time. She was very small inside [...] It hurt each time a man entered her." To my ears, this sounds a little too much like a salacious dwelling upon virginal tightness; it's the sort of detail that would excite a Sadean libertine but which clashes in the compassionate context of this film.

Is it because Franco lost Soledad Miranda in 1970 that his films of 1971 and 72 are so often bleak and melancholy? *Sinner* is a tragic story which finds Franco in particularly sombre and reflective mood. It's noticeable that the 'lighter' films of the period are actually the out-and-out horror films like *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein* and *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein*. It's only later, in 1974, when Franco had perhaps exorcised some of the pain of Miranda's death through such dark and disturbing works as *Countess Perverse*, *Al otro lado del espejo*, *Exorcism* and *Lorna... the Exorcist*, that he can relax for a while and start to have more fun, a development augmented by his growing closeness to Lina Romay and expressed in a quartet of light comedies: *Les Chatouilleuses*, *Le Jouisseur*, *Les Grandes Emmerdeuses* and *Célestine, an All Round Maid*. Whatever the reason, *Sinner* proves that Franco can tell involving stories that transcend the usual exploitation elements, leaving only a smattering of sex to commercialise what amounts to a gruelling psychological drama.

**Franco on screen:** Franco takes a minor role as a police inspector.

**Cast and crew:** Howard Vernon, Kali Hansa, Doris Thomas, Montserrat Prous, Manuel Pereiro and Anne Libert all turn up again from *Les Ébrantées*. In addition to Franco's screenplay credit, *Sinner* lists Elisabeth Ledu de Nesle (producer Robert de Nesle's wife) as writer of 'adaptation and dialogue'. The film's



extensive first person narration does indeed suggest another hand, and it's plausibly female. Whilst the pop-psychology and angsty confessional tone suggest mass market romance paperbacks, the result is nonetheless effective. Franco does not seem the likely author, as much because of the sheer amount of wordage; at this point in his career it's a bit of a stretch to imagine him writing extended monologues.

**Music:** *Sinner's* excellent soundtrack was pieced together by sound editor Gérard Kikoïne, drawing upon library records by Roger Davy, Jean-Bernard Raiteux, Vladimir Cosma and H. Tical (all of whom worked for the excellent and highly collectible 'Musique pour l'image' stable). The film opens with a mesmeric theme for electric guitar, organ and bongos ('Rage Montante' by Roger Davy), based around a simple but implacable guitar riff that picks out harmonics while the organ broods beneath; it sounds like something that slithered out of the recording studio during the sessions for Pink Floyd's *A Saucerful of Secrets*. Another great cue ('Pavane Spatiale' by Vladimir Cosma) combines delicate dulcimer-like guitar with a shuddering bass-line created by bouncing the bow of a cello rhythmically against the strings. Elsewhere there's a mournful guitar-led piece that sounds like early Can ('Stratus' by Roger Davy), interspersed with a handful of free-form cues for piano, percussion and flute (such as Cosma's eerie 'Batiskafka' during the drug party sequence). The music used to underscore Linda's erotic frustration at the clinic can also be heard during the 'arrival of the dead' scenes in *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein*.

**Locations:** Shot entirely in Las Palmas, Gran Canaria.

**UK theatrical release:** Distributed by New Realm Entertainments under the title *Diary of a Nymphomaniac*, the film obtained an 'X' certificate from the BBFC on the 9th of January 1974, although it was cut from its submitted running time of 86m44s. The uncut version released by Mondo Macabro runs 86m39s (the five second discrepancy is probably just a missing distributor's logo). It opened theatrically at the Classic Moulin on Great Windmill Street, London, in March 1974. See Appendix for more details.

**Connections:** As critic Tim Lucas has observed, "This erotic cautionary tale was presumably inspired by the success of such films as Max Pécas' *Je suis une nymphomane/Forbidden Passions* (1970) and Dan Wolman's *Maid in Sweden* (1971)."<sup>1</sup> Like the films to which Lucas refers, *Sinner* is a morality tale about the potential for misery and unhappiness awaiting young women in a promiscuous free-and-easy world of sex and drugs ... The narrative template suggests *Citizen Kane*, with its post-mortem investigation into a dead person's life, and the seeking of explanations for an enigma at the start of the film (in *Kane* a man's dying words, here a suicide). In both cases, the story progresses through numerous flashbacks as the investigator questions the deceased's friends and acquaintances. And in both films, the enigma stems from a traumatic event experienced in youth.

**Other versions:** A hardcore version released as *Les Inassouviées 77* ('The Unsatiated 77') did the rounds of French sex cinemas in the

late 1970s, apparently with scenes cut into it from an unknown French hardcore film by another director. The title *Sinner*, with which the film has been sadly lumbered on DVD following a video release as such in the early 1980s, has nothing whatsoever to do with the story, and is one of the more annoying impositions a Franco film has suffered over the years. There's no religious context to the story at all, and besides, who is the 'sinner' of the film? Certainly not the chief protagonist, who's surely 'more sinned against than sinning'?

**Problematica:** Some sources suggest that the French dub has Yelena Samarina's character name as Hélène, Jacqueline Laurent's as Rosa Ortiz de Urugua and Manuel Pereiro's as Mr. Ortiz.

**Press coverage:** Gareth Jones in *The Monthly Film Bulletin* admired the "overt sexuality" of Maria (Kali Hansa) but felt that, "the disappearance of all plot and characterisation by about the half-way mark and the insistent use of handheld camera work to a narcotic rather than an erotic effect."<sup>2</sup> Marjorie Bilbow in *CinemaTV Today* felt that the film was of limited interest: "What is there to say about this sort of sexy boloney except that it demonstrates the fascination that lesbians must have for male voyeurs ... on this level it's probably erotic and certainly eventful."<sup>3</sup>

## RELAX BABY [Unfinished/Unreleased]

### Spain 1972

#### Alternative titles

**Un tiro en la sien** (SP shooting title) *A Shot in the Head*

#### Production company

**Films Manacoa P.C.** (Madrid)

#### Timeline

shooting date	December	1972
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**Cast:** Alberto Dalbés. Montserrat Prous. Yelena Samarina. José Manuel Martín. Loreta Tovar. Lina Romay. Kali Hansa. Jaime [Jaume] Picas.

**Credits:** director: Jess Franco. screenplay: Jess Franco, Juan Antonio Arévalo Díaz de Quijano, Gonzalo Cañas Olmeda. director of photography: Antonio Millán. music: Jess Franco. producer: Jess Franco. still photography: Ramón Ardid.

**Production notes:** In late November 1972, while shooting at Mar Menor, a salty lagoon on the coast of Southern Spain, Franco met by chance a gorgeous eighteen year old theatre actress called Rosa María Almirall, the wife of his then-current stills photographer,

Ramón Ardid (Ardid had been working intermittently on Franco's films since 1970's *Vampyros Lesbos*). Almirall stepped into a lift with Franco at the hotel where he was staying, and the two of them fell into conversation. Immediately attracted to her vivacious teenage presence, Franco invited her to act for him and hastily convened a new Manacoa production, *Relax Baby*. If the title sounds like Franco's directorial advice to his nervous young ingénue, it's a theory Romay's recollections seem to confirm: "*Oh, for me the whole thing was horrible! I didn't remember my lines. I was very very nervous. My head was pounding the whole first day. It was just going boom, boom, boom, it was just terrible. But by the second day ... I calmed down and was back to normal.*"<sup>1</sup>

Relaxation accomplished, it soon became obvious that Almirall, whom Franco renamed 'Lina Romay' after the Mexican-American singer and screen star of the 1930s and 40s (best known to English-speaking audiences for her appearance in *Señor Droopy*, 1946), was an actress of incomparable ease before the camera. As it turned out, *Relax Baby* was never released, but no matter; Franco had a multitude of other roles in mind for Romay, into which she would throw herself with a vitality and unselfconsciousness that electrified his films and gained her a devoted cult fanbase.

Was *Relax Baby* ever completed? It's hard to say. According to production listings in the Spanish industry journal *Cineinforme*, a shooting permit for the film was applied for on 13 December 1972 and granted on 16 March 1973. As late as May 1974 Manacoa Films were touting *El castillo rojo* and *Relax Baby* as part a slate of 'current product' for distribution (a note to this effect can be found in *Variety*, listing current Spanish product). Lina Romay seemed to think that it was completed, although Franco himself described it as 'unfinished'. Whatever its status, the film has never surfaced and remains unseen as of 2014. Note: five actors associated with *Relax Baby* - Montserrat Prous, José Manuel Martín, Loretta Tovar, Jaime Picas and Lina Romay - appear in the next Franco project, *The Sinister Eyes of Dr. Orloff*. It therefore seems likely that *Relax Baby* would have shared its locations too.

#### Theatrical distributors

**Bilbaína Films** (Bilbao)

#### Timeline

Shooting date	Spring	1973
Spain (SMC records)	25 June	1978
Madrid	12 September	1978

#### Theatrical running time

Spain	81m
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**Cast:** **William Berger** (Dr. Orloff). **Montserrat Prous** (Melissa Comfort). **Edmund Purdom** [as 'Edmond Purdom'] (Inspector Crosby). **Loretta [Loreta] Tovar** (Martha Comfort, Melissa's step-sister). **Kali Hansa** (Lady Flora Comfort). **Joaquín Blanco** [as 'John Russell'] (Nicholas, Inspector Crosby's assistant). **José Manuel Martín** (Albert Mathews, the butler/chauffeur). **Jaime [Jaume] Picas** (Sir Henry Robert Comfort). **Lina Romay** (Davey's girlfriend). **Robert Woods** [as 'Robert Wood'] (Davey Procop, 'Sweet Davey Brown'). *uncredited:* **Jess Franco** (Lord Comfort). **Carlos Lucena** (Pablo, tramp-cum-witness). **Diana Lorys** (picture on Sir Henry Comfort's desk).

**Credits:** director: **Jess Franco**. writer: **Jess Franco**. director of photography: **Antonio Millán**. editor: **Roberto Fandiño**. art director & set dresser: **José Massagué**. music: **David Khunne**. production manager: **Antonio Cervera García**. assistant production: **Isidro Prous**. assistant director: **Ana María Settimó de Esteve**. continuity: **Josefina Pruna**. camera operator: **Alberto Prous**. camera assistant: **Juan A. Prous**. still photography: **Maximo López Piedra**, **Ramón Ardid**. property master: **Alfredo Montenegro**. make-up: **Carmen Menchaca**. assistant make-up: **Elena Cervera de la Torre**. hair stylist: **Hipólita-Emilia López**. assistant editor: **Nicolas Muñoz**. film stock: **Eastmancolor-Kodak**. laboratory: **Cinématiraje Riera, S.A.**. sound re-recording: **Cinearte, S.A.**. *uncredited:* producer: **Jess Franco**.

**Synopsis:** *Paralyzed Melissa Comfort lives at Fisk Manor with her step-sister Martha, her uncle, Sir Henry Comfort, and her aunt, Lady Flora Comfort. Her only friend is the family servant, Mathews, whose job it is to push Melissa's wheelchair and attend to her needs. Melissa suffers dreadful nightmares in which she sees her dying father dripping blood onto her nightgown. Martha suggests calling the noted psychiatrist Dr. Orloff. Upon visiting Melissa, Orloff tells her that her family think she's going insane, and offers to treat her. After a dream in which Melissa murders her uncle, the old man turns up dead the following day. Is Melissa somehow responsible? Or is her family plotting to drive her insane? And can she really trust the gentle, unctuous Dr. Orloff?*

**Production notes:** In February 1973 the Spanish newspaper *La Vanguardia* ran a feature about Franco, who was back in Madrid

## THE SINISTER EYES OF DR. ORLOFF

Spain 1973

*Original theatrical title in country of origin*

**Los ojos del doctor Orloff** (SP) *The Eyes of Dr. Orloff*

*Alternative titles*

**Los ojos siniestros del Dr. Orloff** (SP shooting title)

*Production company*

**Films Manacoa P.C.** (Madrid)



touting a portfolio of his recent films, including *Un capitaine de quinze ans*, *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein*, *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein*, *Un silencio de tumba*, *Vampyros Lesbos*, *The Devil Came from Akasava* and *El muerto hace las maletas*. The list also included something called 'Dr Hokyll y Miss Hyde' (presumably *She Killed in Ecstasy*, the working title for which was 'Mrs. Hyde') and 'La noche tiene ojos' or 'The Night Has Eyes' (probably *Nightmares Come at Night*, for which some sources list the alternative title 'Los ojos de la noche'). Among the titles Franco claimed to be prepping for future co-production "with a French company" were 'Una dama en la oscuridad' ('Lady in the Dark'), a suspense film in the style of Hitchcock (perhaps destined to become *Tender and Perverse Emanuelle?*); 'Femme à travers les barreaux' or 'Woman through the Bars' (probably a script by Alain Petit called *L'Enfer des femmes*, which may have become either *Barbed Wire Dolls* or *Women behind Bars*); a police drama 'in the style of Melville' (which appears never to have emerged unless we're talking about the relatively 'cop-lite' crime drama *Kiss Me Killer*); a story Franco was currently writing "about a young teacher and a nun, fleeing the Vietcong to join the South Vietnamese, who experience tremendous ordeals and adventures" (goodness knows what happened to that), and finally, "a new take on Doctor Orloff" ...<sup>1</sup>

**Review:** If one approaches this film with a sense of anticipation, wondering how Franco will update his classic Orloff story a decade after the original, then *The Sinister Eyes of Dr. Orloff* is deeply disappointing, lacking any trappings of the macabre and devoid of the delirium to be found in Franco's more adventurous work of the period. It's a surprising misfire that squanders the possibilities of an update by adopting the stiff, sensible style of a minor giallo. The film is handsome enough to look at, because Franco, as usual, chooses good locations and interiors. The faces are interesting too: Montserrat Prous once again conveys the hurt innocence that distinguished her starring role in *Sinner*, and sly, feline Kali Hansa is always a welcome sight. What's missing is any sense of madness; there's no aura of strange obsessions, no hint of Gothic insanity breaking through the film's day-lit normalcy. The notion of Orloff wreaking wickedness on the minds rather than their bodies of young women is not really explored, and despite Berger's elegant suavity with a glint of steel he cannot make his Orloff memorable in such a flat and uninspired production.

The films *The Sinister Eyes of Dr. Orloff* resembles are found not in Spanish but American cinema, specifically Robert Vincent O'Neill's *Blood Mania* (1971) and Sergei Goncharoff's *House of Terror* (1972), professionally mounted but essentially dull tales, made coincidentally around the same time as this, built on soap-opera plotting and murderous family intrigue. Much of *The Sinister Eyes of Dr. Orloff* is the sort of mild-mannered fare that could have been shot as an American TV movie in the 1970s. It's always worth noting that Franco can direct in this sober and straightforward manner when the need arises; it proves that his

wilder, more reckless style is a choice, rather than the degeneration it's sometimes construed as. But some grand-guignol extravagance would really have made this film a tastier affair. *The Sinister Eyes of Dr. Orloff* recasts its titular villain as a thoroughly bland professional - a debonair Mills & Boon character in a sharp suit, with a velvety bedside manner that would have worked just fine as a veil for true evil if only the film could shake off the talky mundanity in which it is so unhelpfully mired.

Among very thin pickings, the dramatic and aesthetic highlight comes during one of Melissa's 'nightmares', in which she attacks and kills her faithful manservant as he fixes her broken-down car. The scene is impressive not because the killing is especially shocking, but because Franco allows himself an effective stylistic flourish, double-exposing the action with footage of clouds passing across the sun. In addition to the copious dry ice wafting around in shot, the superimposition creates an agreeably disorientating effect that should have dominated the film more often. The murders are typically circumspect; throat slashings with not a drop of blood; blows to the head minus gore or splintered bone. One learns soon enough not to expect graphic horror from Franco, but even sex and gratuitous weirdness, far more trustworthy components of his style, are absent here. Paced almost as lethargically as *Un silencio de tumba*, nothing seems to really drive the story forward; there's no passion, eccentricity or perversity shining through. It's as if, having set up his Manacoa company, Franco felt obliged to show off his good cinematic manners and conventional craftsmanship, reining in his real talents with cautious inhibition. In context, this is understandable: it seems likely that Manacoa productions, being the outflowings of Franco's first legitimate Spanish company, were designed to avoid any of the unpleasantness that his recent, more adventurous films had encountered with the right-wing censors. Nevertheless, one sympathises with Edmund Purdom's 'Inspector Crosby', who spends much of his investigation getting sozzled in a bar. If this one ever played at a Franco all-nighter it would be the ideal opportunity to step outside for a while and grab a drink. With neither sexual frankness nor improvisational delirium to recommend it, *The Sinister Eyes of Dr. Orloff* plummets like a stone to the nethermost regions of the Franco filmography.

**Franco on screen:** Just a brief glimpse of Jess, playing Melissa's father in the first dream sequence.

**Cast and crew:** Howard Vernon had been set to return to the title role, but other commitments (probably the short-lived French TV comedy series *L'Alphoméga*) prevented him from taking part. Lina Romay has a tiny role as the girlfriend of popstar 'Sweet Davey Brown'.

**Music:** The one intriguing element here is the score, by Franco himself, which rumbles and groans and whistles, hovering like a dark spirit in search of a decent film to haunt. The combination of gloomy Hammond organ and atonal reeds, the latter blown hard to create branching harmonics, is very similar to *The Awful Dr. Orloff*.

**Locations:** Shot in the Canary Islands, with studio work in

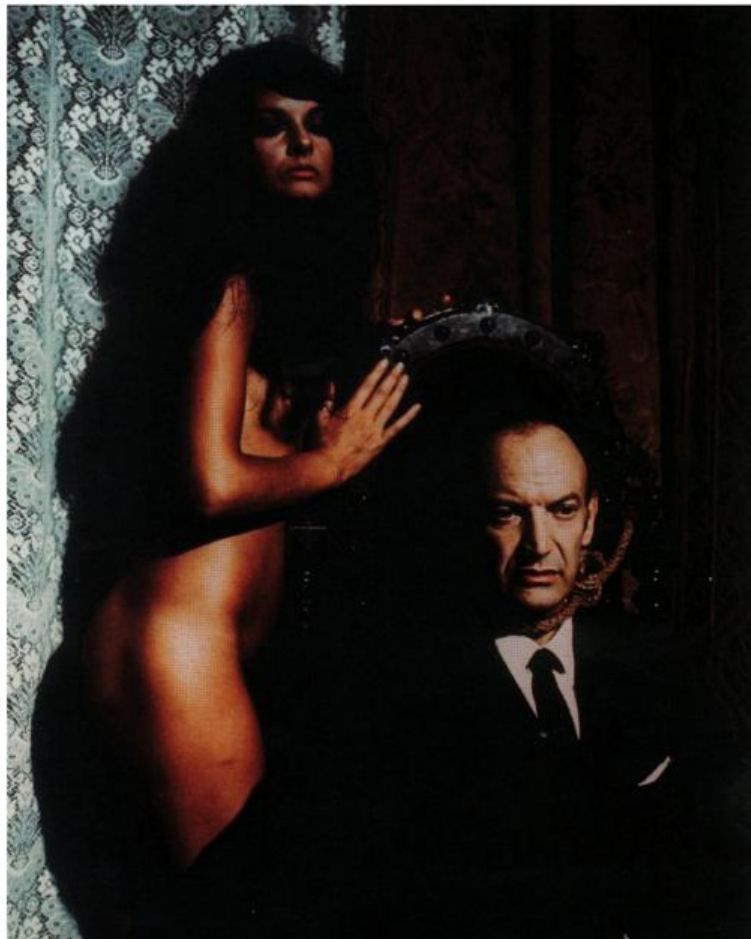




*Female Vampire aka La comtesse noire*  
Irina (Lina Romay) exerts mesmeric control over  
her servant (Luis Barboo) and an inquisitive reporter (Anne Watican).







Anti-clockwise from top left:  
 On Her Majesty's Secret Service... Soledad Miranda in her last role as a glamorous spy in  
*The Devil Came from Akasava*, filmed just a month before her death.  
 Dr. Frankenstein (Dennis Price) conducts fiendish experiments on the victims of Count Dracula  
 (Antonio De Cabo and Eduarda Pimenta) in *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein*.  
 Did anyone order werewolf? 'Brandy' makes an entrance in *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein*.  
 The Queen of the Night (Ann Libert) presides over the unquiet spirit of murdered patriarch  
 Ernesto Reiner (Paul Muller) in *A Virgin Among the Living Dead*.





## *"Une Vierge Chez Les Morts-Vivants"*



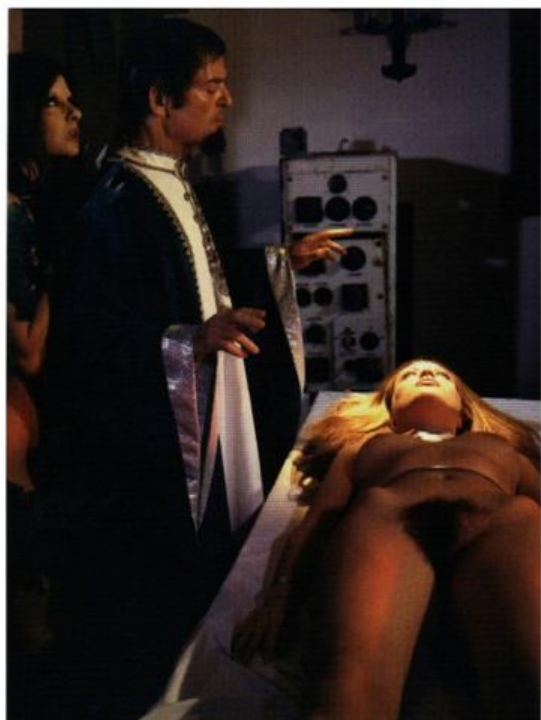
Christina (Christina Von Blanc), a sweet innocent on the brink of sexual initiation.

"Don't you like the taste of blood?" The adult games of Carmence (Britt Nichols) and Linda (Linda Hastreiter) shock the childlike Christina.

Party-time, living dead style: Basilio (Jess Franco), Uncle Howard (Howard Vernon), and Aunt Abigail (Rosita Palomares) gather round the family organ for an unconventional reading of the will.

"I don't joke with Death; she doesn't like it. She doesn't like it at all." Christina seeks comfort with her icy Uncle Howard.









Opposite page: *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein* - Cagliostro's manservant Caronte (Luis Barboo) and Vera Frankenstein (Beatriz Savon) are whipped in a circle of knives by Frankenstein's Monster (Fernando Bilbao). Cagliostro (Howard Vernon) exerts his influence on Madame Orloff (Britt Nichols), to the delight of Melisa the Bird-Woman (Anne Libert).

This page: *The Demons* (clockwise from top left): Lady de Winter (Karin Field) orders a witch to be burned, flanked by Truro the hangman (Luis Barboo, left) and Captain Renfield (Alberto Dalbes, right) ... Truro delights in the torture of Sister Kathleen (Anne Libert) ... Sister Margaret (Britt Nichols) receives Satan in her bedchamber ... Sister Catherine consults a witch as a means to avenge her mother ... Catherine is subjected to the question.





this page (clockwise from top): Linda (Montserrat Prous) seduces Ortiz (Manuel Pereiro) the man who molested her as a child, in *Sinner: the Secret Diary of a Nymphomaniac*.  
 Flamingo Club madame: Berthe on the warpath in *Les Ebranlees*.  
 Leona (Kali Hansa) whips tart-with-a-heart Valentina (Montserrat Prous) under the watchful gaze of brothel madame Berthe (Doris Thomas) in *Les Ebranlees*.

facing page, from *Sinner: the Secret Diary of a Nymphomaniac*:  
 Linda (Montserrat Prous) in distress prior to her suicide.  
 Ruth Ortiz (Jacqueline Laurent) meets with Linda's friend Maria (Kali Hansa) to discuss the role her husband played in Linda's death.  
 Linda's life with Maria: a whirl of drugs, sex and prostitution.









ABOVE: *Sinner: Secret Diary of a Nymphomaniac*. Pornographer Mrs. Schwartz (Doris Thomas) snaps pictures of Maria (Kali Hansa) ... Linda meets an apparently kindly doctor (Howard Vernon).  
 BELOW: *How to Seduce a Virgin*. Martine de Bressac (Alice Arno) returns from psychiatric prison to be greeted by her sex slave Adele (Lina Romain) and manservant Mathias (Howard Vernon).



FACING PAGE: *How to Seduce a Virgin*. Martine, a literal 'femme castratrice' ... whip in hand ... spying on her next possible victim with Charles (Robert Woods), her Sadean soulmate.





From *Countess Perverse*

THIS PAGE:

Alice Arno in her iconic role as Countess Zaroff, hunter of human meat

FACING PAGE, clockwise from top left:

Count Zaroff (Howard Vernon), on the steps of La Manzanera,  
sends the signal for more victims

Countess Zaroff with would-be escapee Kali Hansa  
Silvia (Lina Romay) stays overnight with the Zaroffs.  
...and discovers their macabre secret.

Count Zaroff shows off his butchery skills  
The Countess seduces Sylvia











THIS PAGE (anti-clockwise from above)

*The Hot Nights of Linda*: seductive Olivia Radeck (Lina Romay) - did she rape Linda?

Governess Marie-France (Alice Arno) finds Olivia fraternising with the hired help (Pierre Taylou)

*The Lustful Amazon*: Queen Arminda (Alice Arno) surveys the conquered Maciste (Wal Davis)

*Les Gloutonnes*: Black magician Parqua (Kali Hansa) in sacrificial mood





MAIN PICTURE

*Les Grandes Emmerdeuses*; after handing over stolen diamonds Pina (Lina Romay) and Tina (Pamela Stanford) are attacked by Lola (Lisa Ferrera) and the fake Mr. Radeck (Willy Braque).

BELOW

Pina and Tina prepare for seduction in *Les Grandes Emmerdeuses*  
Celestine (Lina Romay) cavorts with Malou (Bigotini)  
in the sex farce *Celestine, An All Round Maid*











**FEMALE VAMPIRE**

Irina (Lina Romay) fails to assuage her eternal hunger  
with an inquisitive photographer (Anne Watican)  
and so must pleasure herself in search of relief...



Barcelona. The exteriors of the Comfort family abode, the police station and Orloff's sanatorium all look rather similar, and one would not be surprised if Franco had simply filmed three different sides of the same large building for these key locations! Shared locations with the next film, *How to Seduce a Virgin*, strongly suggest that the two were shot consecutively.

**Connections:** Aside from the music, the only other element to be reprised from *The Awful Dr. Orloff* is the name of Melissa.

**Other versions:** Due to a persistent misattribution on video and DVD covers, this film is usually referred to as "Los ojos siniestros del Doctor Orloff", a state of affairs which has persisted into its English-language subtitled release as *The Sinister Eyes of Dr. Orloff*. However, the onscreen title of the only known theatrical release is plain old *Los ojos del Doctor Orloff*.

## HOW TO SEDUCE A VIRGIN

France 1973

French visa number: 41409

*Original theatrical title in country of origin*

**Plaisir à trois** (FR) *Pleasure for Three*

*Alternative titles*

**Plaisir à 3** (FR theatrical poster)

**Piacere a tre** (IT theatrical poster) *Pleasure with Three*

**Les Inassouviés no. 2** (FR working title) *The Unsatiated No.2*

**Outre-tombe** (shooting title [MF]) *Beyond the Grave*

**Ultratumba** (shooting title [OB]) *Afterlife*

*Production company*

**Comptoir Français du Film Production** (Paris)

*Theatrical distributors*

**Comptoir Français du Film Production** (Paris)

*Timeline*

Shooting date	from 9 April	1973
France	20 February	1974
French visa issued	27 February	1974
Rejected by the BBFC	08 May	1974
Belgium (Brussels)	30 January	1975
UK regional 'X' release	June	1975

*Theatrical running time*

France	72m
UK	64m

**Cast:** **Alice Arno** (Martine de Bressac). **Robert Woods** (Charles de Bressac). **Howard Vernon** (Mathias, housekeeper/chauffeur). **Tania Busselier** (Cécile). **Alfred Baillou** (Malou, the gardener). *uncredited:* **Lina Romay** (Adèle). **Joaquín Blanco** (Martine's psychiatrist). **Jaume Picas** (Cécile's father).

**Credits:** director: **Jess Franco**. screenplay & adaptation: **Jess Franco**. dialogue by **Alain Petit**. director of photography: **Gérard Brissaud**. editor: **Gérard Kikoïne**. music: **Daniel Janin**, **Robert Hermel**. producer: **Robert de Nesle**. continuity: **Simone Leguillon**. still photography: **Howard Vernon** [as 'Mario Lippert']. assistant editor: **Patrick Deconinck**. film stock: **Kodak Eastmancolor**. laboratory: **G.T.C.** (Joinville-le-Pont). sound recordist: **Michel Condo**.

**Synopsis:** *Wealthy sadist Martine de Bressac is discharged from a mental institute by her too-trusting psychiatrist. Back home, she greets her mentally disturbed dwarf hunchback gardener Malou, her traumatised female sex slave Adèle, and her psychopath husband Charles. In the cellar Martine keeps a collection of human corpses turned into sculptures and posed in postures of agony. After picking and up and murdering Rosa, a prostitute, Martine and Charles hire a seafront apartment to spy on their next young victim – Cécile, daughter of a rich diplomat who lives across the street... Soon, Cécile is a regular visitor to the Bressacs' home. However, despite regular sexual liaisons, 'pleasure for three' proves to be an unreliable formula...*

**Production notes:** On 9 April 1973 shooting began on *Plaisir à trois* (aka *How to Seduce a Virgin*), one of the highlights of Franco's sojourn with French producer Robert de Nesle. It began life as a script written by film journalist Alain Petit from a treatment handed to him by Franco. Petit was already a fan, and, thrilled to be working with a man whose work he adored, he gleefully created a story based on his preference for horror of a fantastical nature. Petit recalls that Franco initially tried to interest Spanish producer José Maria Forqué in the script, but Forqué, anticipating trouble with the Spanish censor, cordially declined (a wise decision, because there's no way the film's erotic elements could be toned down without ruining the story: sex and cruelty are integral to the narrative. Franco and Forqué would instead work together on *Al otro lado del espejo*). Franco then turned to Robert de Nesle and Comptoir Français du Film Production. However, de Nesle disliked the fantastical content and asked for the film to be slanted towards the real world. Elements of Petit's original intentions survive, however, in the mysterious cellar of victims, frozen between life and living death like participants in some malign game of statues...<sup>1</sup>

**Review:** Another of Franco's free adaptations of the Marquis de Sade, *How to Seduce a Virgin* earns an exalted place in the director's pantheon thanks to its seductive portrait of amorality,

and the script's unsentimental commitment to the libertine's point of view. Considering the film was shot in under two weeks, the performances are focussed and believable, and the technical execution admirable. Maybe the pace slows down here and there after an action-packed first half-hour, but the film regains its mojo for a satisfyingly wicked climax.

The opening scenes subvert the genre cliché of the innocent but unstable woman returning home from the asylum. Countless potboilers begin in this vein, with the subsequent tale showing malicious acquaintances or relatives trying to drive the heroine back into the loony-bin. However, we quickly understand that the woman in this case is far from fragile; Martine is rich, happy, confident, commanding the respect of her staff and the grovelling adoration of her live-in love slave. Clearly she is not an habitual victim. What follows, as Martine descends the modernist staircase to her devastatingly chic 1970s basement and strolls around checking her 'statues' – human beings, frozen in positions of agony, chained to the walls and posed against pillars – is fabulously eerie and unnerving. The explanation for Martine's menagerie (a paralysing drug) is withheld until the climax of the film; to begin with we're not sure if the bodies are dead or alive. They look like what they really are – living people holding a pose. As such this cellar of silent torture becomes a sado-erotic dream-space, in which seemingly impossible fantasies of cruelty and control are possible.

Having checked that her collection remains intact, Martine glides down the seafront in her chauffeured limousine, cruising for hookers to the accompaniment of a fabulously crude and sleazy guitar riff which seems to celebrate her unrepentant wickedness. A lunatic discharged from the madhouse who immediately goes on the rampage: it's the kind of story we're shocked to read in tabloid news reports, but in the erotic economy of Franco's cinema Martine is virtually a heroine, a 'Juliette' in his Sadean scheme. Picking up a cynical hooker called "Rosa – but what does it matter?" Martine invites her back to do some 'modelling'. Scarcely believing her luck, the hooker settles in for some easy money, but she signs her own death warrant by moaning about the boredom of holding a pose. Irritated, Martine takes the foolish woman down to the cellar and subjects her to a good whipping before making her hold a pose for a *very* long time as part of her 'sculpture' collection. (The modelling sequence boasts a telling erotic detail; when sketching her victim-to-be, the first thing Martine actually draws is the hooker's vaginal slit! Not for the last time in his cinema, Franco reveals himself as first and foremost a pussy-hound.)

Alice Arno here proves herself one of Franco's best performers. She has an almost doll-like face, smooth and feline, suggestive of the Far East, with a pixie-ish tinge to her turned-up nose and a calm yet cruel set to her mouth. In fact there's a trace of old-Hollywood in Ms. Arno's features; one can imagine her in a classic film-noir, or a tears-behind-the-glitter showbiz tale from

the 1940s. The other major player is Robert Woods as Charles de Bressac. Franco introduces him beautifully: as Martine whips the screaming Rosa, her gaze (and ours) alights upon a corpse-sculpture, swathed in shadows, from behind which Charles emerges. Woods is the epitome, here, of the swinging-Seventies sleazeball – rich, casually attired, wolfishly confident, with a cold sliver of threat behind the charm. He's like Ted Bundy pretending to be a continental fashion photographer, and clearly drives Martine crazy with lust.

The 'third party' referred to in the original French title is Cécile, the new and youthful object of the couple's lusts. However, unlike Arno and Woods, actress Tania Busselier seems miscast. Not to be ungallant, but she's an unconvincing ingénue, being a little older than the role requires. Busselier doesn't lack feminine charm, but Franco can't quite sell her as a naive young girl, which robs the twist ending of some of its power. Among the supporting players, dwarf actor Alfred Baillou is truly memorable as a weird old gardener obsessed with a terrible experience years ago in which he witnessed a falling bishop whose head cracked open, "*like an egg... like an egg*" (the story is apparently based on a reminiscence of Buñuel's). Mathias the butler, played by Howard Vernon, never gets involved in the sex but knows everything that's going on and flits smoothly in and out of the background. Quite why the character is left unexplored is a puzzle, especially when Vernon could so easily have given more: perhaps he was a late addition to the story? Most importantly of all, Lina Romay makes an immediate impression in her first major role for Franco, playing Martine's mute, retarded sex slave Adèle. A stand-out scene has Martine and Charles making out, grunting and moaning and talking dirty while Adèle frigs herself against them, adding retarded little squeaks to their wild moans in what has to have been the weirdest dubbing session of 1973. Lina's 'crazy little girl' act, smearing lipstick chaotically onto her lips, further adds to the uncomfortable black comedy of this erotically out-of-control household.

Yes, I did say comedy. In true Sadean style, *How to Seduce a Virgin* can be very funny indeed. I treasure the scene in which Charles and Martine, both nude, spy indolently on the girl next door from an upstairs window, caressing each other as they do so. Suddenly the comely young treasure walks out of the gate and heads off down the street with her parents. In a flurry of pants and shirts and cries of "*Vite! Vite!*" the libertines dash outside, arriving on the pavement in such haste that they must quickly calm themselves, straighten their clothes and control their demeanour, to appear as simply two young lovers out for a stroll! What makes it so funny is that we're watching two icy sophisticates, who see themselves above the common herd, forced by the extremity of their desires into ungainly comical behaviour that would not look out of place in a Three Stooges film.

The over-riding theme of *How to Seduce a Virgin* is erotic obsession and voyeurism. Martine and Charles bring themselves







above: Martine (Alice Arno) and Charles (Robert Woods) take great pleasure in the suffering of others ... Deranged housemaid Adèle (Lina Romay) worships her mistress Martine.  
below: Adèle predicts a UK certificate ... Cécile (Tania Busselier), Charles and Adèle enjoy Martine's mute horror ... Martine and Charles in more harmonious times.



## GLC ignores anti-porn protestors

THE GLC refused to be "seduced" this week by members of the Festival of Light and the Salvation Army.

For despite the extra-mural influence of some 100 anti-porn campaigners, including Lord Longford, who went down on their knees as the council met, the GLC endorsed its viewing board's decision to give a certificate to "How To Seduce A Virgin."

By Quentin Falk

The French sex film, which has been variously described as a "tale of murder and sex in a mental hospital" and telling "how a husband procures a woman for his lesbian wife to seduce and murder" was refused a certificate by the British Board of Film Censors.

The film was eventually passed by 44 votes to 36, much to the chagrin of the praying campaigners.

Cinecitta, who are handling the film, originally sought a GLC certificate in January and then withdrew the film when the big censorship debate came up in council at the end of that month.

After the GLC voted to retain censorship for adults, Cinecitta then offered the film again for consideration.

Commented viewing board chairman, Phil Bassett: "It's a rather sordid, seedy film."

SEE ALSO PAGE 4

to the boil spying on Cécile through binoculars; later they watch surreptitiously through a crack in the door as Cécile is seduced by Adèle, all the while whispering their lust to each other, winding each other up into greater and greater sadistic anticipation. To illustrate this, Franco musters some compelling compositions, not least when Woods stands behind Arno, fondling her breasts as she peers through the binoculars, an image that conflates the two of them into one sex-crazed Hydra, supplanting the isolation of voyeurism with the erotic thrill of folie à deux. If a problem shared is a problem halved, then a pleasure shared is a pleasure doubled. (Franco revels in this formula – sadistic male-female couples proliferate in his cinema.) However, in a reversal that may induce whiplash in unwary viewers, our own voyeurism is both parodied and punished: when Charles catches Malou the gardener spying through the bathroom window on Cécile and Martine, he picks up the diminutive hunchback and hurls him to the ground. Then, as the camera peers through the window at him, Charles turns and stares directly back, with a look of dawning incredulity and hostility. It's a petrifying moment that challenges the audience, bruising our voyeuristic displacement and safety. Charles of course is a voyeur par excellence, but the voyeuristic gaze is a jealous gaze, with its illusion of ownership and control; his angry glare down the lens of Franco's camera makes that point quite clear in a way that challenges our own easy pleasure.

Jealousy and voyeurism are so insidiously interlinked in this story that the title *Plaisir à trois* ('pleasure for three') becomes ironical. This is a film in which the harmonious distribution of energies in open relationships is fraught with difficulty, even for out-and-out sickos. Despite plotting to seduce and kill Cécile, Martine is still jealous when Charles fucks the girl; she's even jealous when Cécile makes it with Adèle. In this, Franco adheres to a conventional formula in sex films of the 1970s, namely 'troilism means trouble'.

It's little wonder that the film was originally banned in the UK. It's about voyeurism as a sadistic component of sexuality, hardly a comforting theme for a censorship board obsessed with protecting the public from the harmful effects of pornography. In *How to Seduce a Virgin* Franco seems positively to revel in the idea that the voyeuristic tease leads inexorably to sadism. While the explicitness is well within modern tolerances, Franco adopts an authentically Sadean philosophical outlook that dispenses with social obligation and morality. This is his most sophisticated solution to the challenge of adapting Sade: the point is not to flood the screen with imagery that would get the film banned in every country in the world; real subversion is to make a film that does what censors fear all sex films do, to arouse in the viewer a sense of the erotic possibilities when one's own gratification is the foremost principle. The final scenes sound the only note of caution, as a key character is suddenly betrayed, proving that bonds forged in selfish pleasure provide no basis for trust. On

the one hand, it means the story has a moral after all – you can't trust a libertine! On the other, if you're a selfish loner with no need for company, affection or approval, the world really is your squirming oyster...

**Cast and crew:** *How to Seduce a Virgin* and its back-to-back sibling *Countess Perverse* star Alice Arno, a strikingly beautiful actress who would work on a total of twelve Franco films in the 1970s. Always very appreciative and positive about Franco, she adored his approach to the industry, telling an interviewer from *Sex Stars System* in 1975, "I dream of being able to spend my time filming constantly, like Jess Franco ... Last year, for example, I filmed for ten months out of twelve, it was great!" (The 'last year' in question was actually 1973, during which Arno appeared in nine Franco films). She then had this to say about his working methods: "In the case of Jess Franco, he explains beforehand what should be done. There are no problems, no surprises ... and then, if there's no direct sound, he helps by providing guidance: where to place your hands ... whether to kiss the girl, how to caress ... Because he knows ... and this is somewhat true for all filmmakers: they have a little cinema inside their heads [...] Of course, sometimes they let me do what I want, but it always remains linked to that plan..."<sup>2</sup>

**Music:** The main musical theme here, unfamiliar from other Franco films of the time, is a sleazy and menacing piece for electric piano, organ, bass guitar and percussion; loose, exploratory, with an almost comically sinister quality as the bass glissandos up and down. Elsewhere, grimy fuzz guitar adds the requisite aura of sleazy decadence, and an oddly pitched melody played on a recorder or pipe suggests both the unbalanced derangement of the sadistic Martine and traumatised Adèle, and the childish self-gratification guiding Martine and Charles.

**Locations:** Shot in Portugal and the Canary Islands, on the some of the same locations as *The Sinister Eyes of Dr. Orloff*.

**UK theatrical release:** *Plaisir à trois* was submitted to the BBFC as *How to Seduce a Virgin* in the spring of 1974, and met with a flat rejection. However, at the time, if a film was banned by the BBFC it was still possible to ask for a 'local X' from individual council authorities. Thus, in 1975 the Cinecenta chain submitted the film to London's then governing body, the Greater London Council (GLC), for consideration.<sup>3</sup> They succeeded: *How To Seduce a Virgin* was granted a number of local certificates and entered distribution in the summer of 1975, receiving a *Continental Film Review* photo-feature in July. In a minor claim-to-fame footnote, it was one of three sex films viewed by the Christian 'moral reformer' Lord Longford in 1975, during a short-lived 'fact-finding mission' that was little more than a prelude to his campaign against pornography. Longford reportedly saw *Erotic Inferno* and *Hot Acts of Love* at the Astral Cinema in Soho, and later, *How to Seduce A Virgin*. According to contemporary sources he walked out of the latter, a testament perhaps to the film's dark erotic charge; either that, or *Hot Acts of Love* had already, as it were, 'finished him off'. See Appendix for more details.

**Connections:** The story is another loose variation on the de Sade's *Philosophy in the Bedroom* (see also *Eugenie... the Story of her Journey into Perversion*), with Arno in a role analogous to the book's Madame St. Ange, Busselier as the Eugenie character, and Woods as de Mirvel. Franco takes the skeleton of the Sade story, in which two older lovers (brother and sister in the book) seduce a young girl for the purpose of her amoral education, while ditching the book's Dolmance character, removing the attacks on Eugenie's mother (an element of Sade's original story that has proven beyond the pale even for Franco), and adding the theme of betrayal. This latter element, whilst not in the original story, may have been suggested by two conflicting passages in *Philosophy in the Bedroom* which are juxtaposed without comment by Sade: in one, the character of Dolmance announces to Madame St. Ange and Mirvel, "'Wolves are safe in their own company,' as the proverb has it, and trivial though it may be, 'tis true. My friends, dread nothing from me, ever: I'll perhaps have you do much that is evil, but never will I do any to you.'" Yet just a few paragraphs later, when encouraging Eugenie to embark upon the murder of her mother, Dolmance warns her: "Permit me a few words of advice which, before you act, are of the utmost necessity. Never let your secret go out of your mouth, my dear, and always act alone: nothing is more dangerous than an accomplice: let us always beware of even those whom we think most closely attached to us: 'One must,' wrote Machiavelli, 'either have no confederates, or dispatch them as soon as one has made use of them.'" It's not unusual for Sade to contradict himself; indeed the attentive reader, confronted with so much that is incendiary and provocative in the man's writings, may find himself or herself aroused to seek out inconsistencies, such is the urgency and recklessness of the arguments being unfolded. It's striking that Franco should have homed in on just such a moment in Sade, using it as an unsutured invitation to 'fuck' the text and add his own variations. Certainly it proves that Franco was a careful and dedicated reader of Sade and not just inclined to flip through the texts looking for the naughty bits! ... The notion of bodies as art objects frozen in postures of agony links this film to the more comedic *Sadisterotica* and also to the fantastical stage shows of *The Diabolical Dr. Z* and *Vampyros Lesbos*. The theme stretches back through Giorgio Ferroni's *Mill of the Stone Women* (1960), Roger Corman's *A Bucket of Blood* (1959), André De Toth's *House of Wax* (1953) and the gruesome tableaux-vivants in Irving Pichel and Ernest B. Schoedsack's *The Most Dangerous Game* (1932).

**Other versions:** The English language theatrical print, *How to Seduce a Virgin*, has never been available on video or DVD, although Mondo Macabro released the French cut with the UK theatrical title in deference to its eye-catching shelf potential ... Buyer beware: a French video release of the William Grefé chestnut *Death Curse of Tartu* used the *Plaisir à trois* shooting title *Outre-tombe*, and lists Jess Franco as director on the cover! ... Oddly, despite the existence of poster artwork I can find no evidence of the Italian release, *Piacere a tre*, in newspaper listings.

## COUNTESS PERVERSE

France 1973

French visa number: 41408

Original theatrical title in country of origin

**La Comtesse perverse** (FR) *The Perverse Countess*

Alternative titles

**Les Croqueuses** (FR theatrical re-release) *The Munchers*

**Sexy Nature** (IT theatrical & GER DVD)

**La Comtesse Zaroff** (shooting title [MF])

**Les Chasses de la Comtesse Zaroff** ('production title' [MF])

**The Hunt of Mme Zarkoff** (report in *Variety*, Aug 22nd 1973)

Unconfirmed title

**La Croqueuse Comtesse** (FR alt. title) *The Munching Countess*

Production company

**Comptoir Français du Film Production** (Paris)

Theatrical distributors

**Comptoir Français du Film Production** (Paris)

Timeline

Shooting	April	1973
Scenes for <i>Les Croqueuses</i> shot	April	1974
France	18 September	1974
Hardcore scenes for <i>Les Croqueuses</i>	circa autumn	1974
French visa issued ( <i>Les Croqueuses</i> )	11 December	1974
Belgium (Brussels)	29 May	1975
Italy (Florence) ( <i>Sexy Nature</i> )	03 October	1980

Theatrical running time

France (as *Les Croqueuses*) 69m

**Cast:** **Alice Arno** (Countess Ivanna Zaroff). **Robert Woods** (Bob Newbar). **Howard Vernon** (Count Rador Zaroff). **Tania Busselier** (Moirra Newbar). *uncredited:* **Kali Hansa** (Kali, the fugitive). **Lina Romay** (Sylvia Aguado). **Ramón Ardid** (boatman).

*Cast for the additional Les Croqueuses footage, director Jess Franco:* **Tania Busselier**. **Lina Romay**. **Caroline Rivière** (Carole, a writer). **Monica Swinn** (captive of Countess Zaroff). **Pierre Taylou** (captive fondled by Sylvia).

**Credits:** director: **Jess Franco**. screenplay & adaptation: **Jess Franco**. dialogue by **Elisabeth Ledu de Nesle**. director of photography: **Gérard Brissaud**. editors: **Gérard Kikoïne**. music: **Jean Bernard Raiteux**, **Olivier Bernard**. presenter [i.e.



producer]: **Robert de Nesle**. production secretary: **Fernande Meunier**. continuity: **Simone Leguillon**. still photography: **Howard Vernon** [as 'Mario Lippert']. assistant editor: **Patrick Deconinck**. film stock: **Kodak Eastmancolor**. laboratory: **G.T.C.** (Joinville-le-Pont). sound recordist: **Michel Condo**.

"I wanted the ideal animal to hunt," explained the general. "So I said, 'What are the attributes of an ideal quarry?' And the answer was, of course, 'It must have courage, cunning, and, above all, it must be able to reason.'" "But no animal can reason," objected Rainsford. "My dear fellow," said the general, "there is one that can." - from the short story 'The Most Dangerous Game' (1924) by Richard Connell

"Hunt first the enemy, then the woman ... It is the natural instinct ... What is woman, even such a woman as this, until the blood is quickened by the kill?" - Count Zaroff, in *The Most Dangerous Game* (Irving Pichel & Ernest B. Schoedsack, 1932)

**Synopsis:** Bob lives by the sea with his wife Moira. From their home overlooking the coast, they spot an unconscious young woman washed up on the beach. They bring her indoors and she revives. She explains that she has recently escaped from a strange island just off the coast. While searching for her missing sister she was set upon and raped by the island's aristocratic owners, The Count and Countess Zaroff. Unfortunately for the fugitive, Moira and Bob are procurers of victims for the Zaroffs, interested only in the money they can make by feeding their neighbours' sick requirements. After returning the woman to the island, the couple invite a young friend, Sylvia, to stay. They seduce her into a threesome, before taking her over to the island. The Zaroffs cook their guests dinner at their extraordinary coastal abode, amusing themselves by feeding the visitors human flesh cut from earlier victims. Bob begins to resent the Zaroffs, having fallen in love with Sylvia, and leaves after an argument with the Count. In the night, Sylvia is seduced by the Countess, and later wakes up and walks into the great hall to discover the two aristocrats carving up the nude body of the escapee. When Sylvia refuses to appreciate the nobility of their enterprise, she is set free to run nude through the countryside, the quarry in a bizarre naked hunting spree...

**Production notes:** After *How To Seduce a Virgin*, Franco delivered another great film of the period, *La Comtesse perverse* aka *Countess Perverse*. Made during the last week of April (allowing a three week shoot for *Plaisir à trois*), it was completed in an astonishing five days. Though the film is commonly regarded as having being shot back-to-back with *How To Seduce a Virgin*, Alain Petit goes further, asserting that *Countess Perverse* was "improvised totally" during the shoot for *How to Seduce a Virgin*, with the same cast and crew.<sup>1</sup> If this is what Franco can achieve under such conditions, it's truly a miracle; one of his most compelling and memorable films of the 1970s, invented on the spot and filmed in the midst of another shoot! Further material was added some time later, when Robert de Nesle asked for the film to be 'sexed up' (see 'Other versions').

**Review:** In *Countess Perverse*, Franco's rough-and-ready technique takes on a ragged dreamlike power. An erotic spin on the RKO classic *The Most Dangerous Game* (1932), based around the hunting of women for sport, and the powerful taboo of cannibalism, *Countess Perverse* seems all the more compelling because of its loose ends and haphazard elements. It begins quietly, with a man and woman, Bob Newbar (Robert Woods) and his wife Moira (Tania Busselier), standing on the verandah of their lovely beach-house overlooking the coastline. Spotting a naked young woman lying unconscious on the beach, they run to the water's edge and carry her back indoors. The woman, called Kali (Kali Hansa), regains consciousness and sobbingly tells Bob and Moira what has happened to her. We see her story unfold in a prolonged flashback, beginning with a journey out to sea...

This is a film in which even a simple boat-trip can feel totally disorientating. For a start, the sea journey lasts far longer than necessary for the amount of narrative information conveyed. Shots are cut together jumpily, discontinuously; sometimes we sail near enough to the island to see rock strata in the cliffs, only for another shot to pinball us back, half a mile away, with the island just a vague hump in the distance. You may think this sounds like bad editing, but it happens so blatantly and repeatedly that it's without a doubt deliberate. It has the effect of loosening our spatial and temporal co-ordination, rendering the journey to the island surrealistic and mysterious, an effect amplified by glimpses of the Zaroff residence atop the cliffs - an extraordinary modernist construction previously seen in *She Killed in Ecstasy* (see 'Locations'). Franco's hand-held camera, with the angles canted and tilted by the choppy sea, creates a jittery instability, while the wide-angle lens adds a dreamlike quality to shots of Hansa and the briefly glimpsed boatman. After this unnerving journey, we cut to Kali clambering fully clothed from the sea and onto a rocky beach. In voice-over she sobs, "He wouldn't go any closer. I had to swim all the way to that evil house." It's here that we encounter an ellipse, apparently native to Franco's original cut, over which the dubbing tries to paper. Hansa's line about the boatman implies that he was just a casual acquaintance, unsympathetic to her wishes. However, as they approached the island we saw her place one hand on the man's shoulder and slip the other round his bicep. It's rather intimate for just a background character, which makes you wonder if his role was intended to be greater. Was he written as Kali's boyfriend, who drowned when the boat hit the rocks? In *The Most Dangerous Game* (1932) Count Zaroff's victims arrive on the island after a shipwreck. Sadly, scrutiny of the newly available original cut reveals no extra material, and certainly no shipwreck. Perhaps the notion was abandoned in the edit?

Hansa's laborious climb from sea to rocky beach is ungainly, awkward and nightmarish, redolent of those dreams in which one mysteriously cannot walk or run. On the soundtrack, an eerily cavorting organ straight out of *Carnival of Souls* adds to the discomfiture. As the flashback continues, we see her ascend a flight

of stone stairs leading from the beach. Her voice-over refers to a feeling of dread, and the sense that she was being watched. Right on cue, we see Alice Arno as Countess Ivanna Zaroff, peering through binoculars. What we *don't* see, however, is Kali reaching the top of the stairs, nor for that matter meeting the Countess. Instead, in a puzzling ellipse, we cut to Hansa descending a fantastically bizarre, geometrically outlandish interior staircase, accompanied by the Countess and the previously unseen Count Zaroff, played by Howard Vernon. Hansa is now dressed differently, in a flowing blue gown rather than the floral-patterned blouse and dark pants she wore in the exterior shots. At first it seems as though a major scene has been cut. Was footage lost or damaged, overexposed, or out of focus? Perhaps by omitting material relating to the shipwreck, the death of the boyfriend, and Kali's first distressed conversation with the Zaroffs, then roughly stitching the remaining scenes together with a voice-over, Franco was able to create a different narrative path? Or is it just that the five day shooting schedule resulted in unavoidable continuity glitches, and Franco figured he could get away with them?

After a guided tour round the Zaroffs' home in which the aristocrats show off to Kali their collection of wall-mounted animal trophies, we cut to a prolonged sex scene in the middle of the night, with the Zaroffs ravishing their young visitor. Another cut takes us to a scene of Count Zaroff cooking a female corpse in a large flaming oven, while a nude and trussed up Kali looks on in horror. At this point the flashback ends and we return to Bob and Moira. They agree that the delirious fugitive will have to be taken back to the Zaroffs. Only now do we realise that the apparently innocuous couple are unscrupulous kidnappers, who habitually provide victims for the Zaroffs in return for money. Bizarrely, nothing is made of this revelation; it could have been a jolting moment of horror, but the writing and staging of the scene is perversely casual. In the film's most egregious 'ellipse' we never actually see Kali being returned to her tormentors. She simply disappears from the film for the next forty-five minutes, only reappearing later as a corpse on the Zaroffs' butcher slab, an oversight which asks a lot of our comprehension and, more importantly, throws away the chance for some sobbing despair as the victim is returned to her tormentors (a sadistic flourish that Franco would *not* neglect in his later *Women-in-Prison* films).

Instead, we move on. Bob telephones a young woman called Sylvia (Lina Romay) with the intention of selling her to the Zaroffs. He and Moira seduce the girl, then take her to the Zaroffs' for dinner, in a sequence that mirrors the one with Kali Hansa earlier: it begins with a walk down the same staircase and into the same circular-windowed dining area. Apropos of nothing, Bob grows angry when Count Zaroff drools and leers over Sylvia, having become implausibly enamoured of her during their single day together. Quite what motivates his change of heart is anyone's guess. "*Bob is a man of strong passions. Had his education been as strong, he would be perfect,*" smirks Count Zaroff as the younger

man storms from the table. The narrative is so sketchily drawn here that Moira seems to disappear, and we don't know if she's still on the island. The emphasis shifts to Sylvia, who wakes during the night and enters the great hall to find the Zaroffs calmly chopping up the corpse of the errant Kali. The Count is sincerely proud of his work and tries to elicit appreciation from Sylvia, telling her that it was human meat she enjoyed at supper. Sylvia, understandably distraught, faints away. When she revives, the Zaroffs boast to her of the 'noble' rules of their game. They will not kill her in cold blood; instead she must flee for her life, pursued by the Countess who will hunt her down with bow and arrows. In another steal from *The Most Dangerous Game*, Count Zaroff informs the trembling girl that if she can evade death until the clock strikes nine, she wins her freedom.

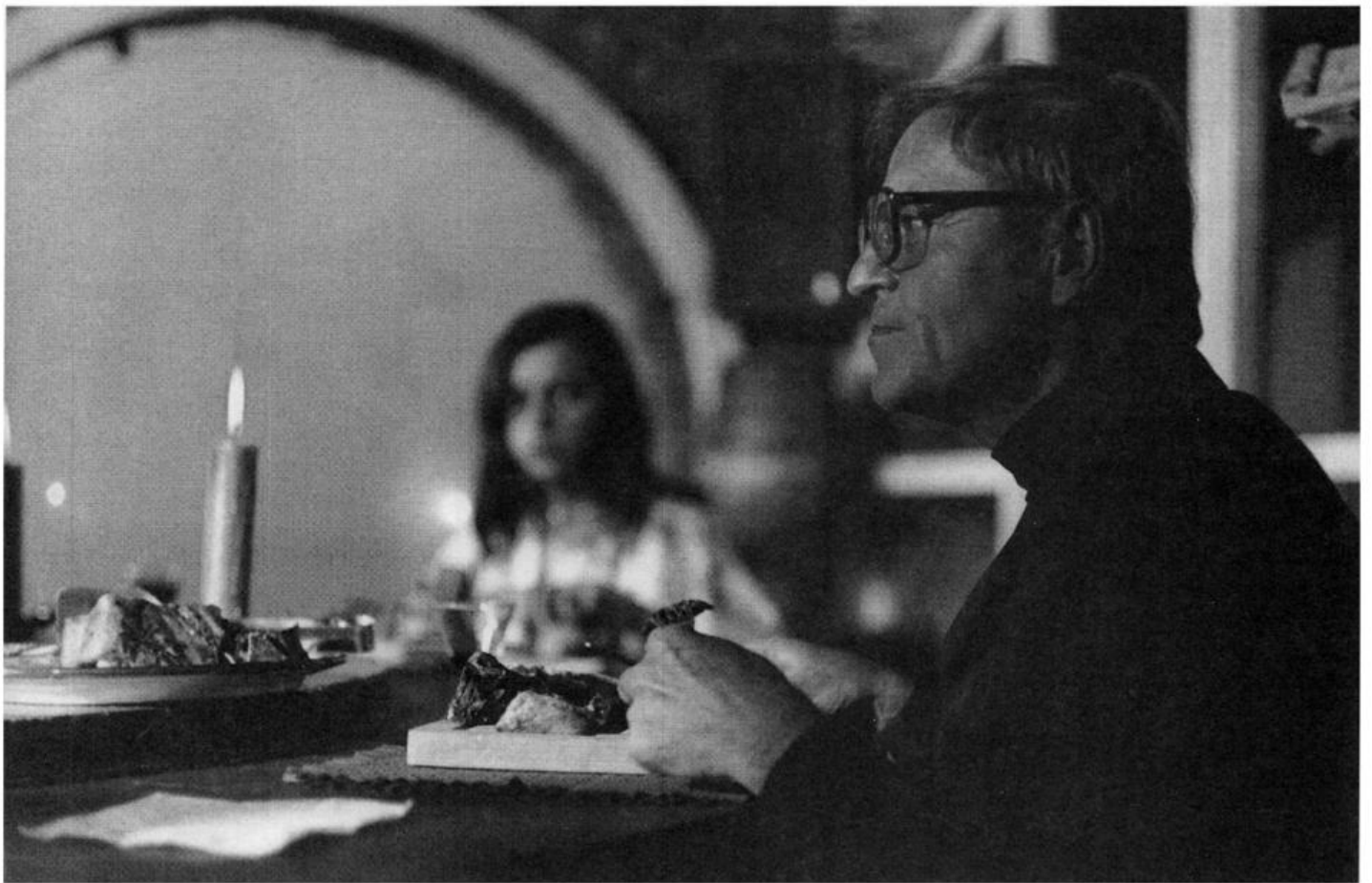
What follows is a wonderfully bizarre sequence that feels ripped from the pages of the Italian *fumetti* (sexy Italian comic-strips), with the Countess, nude except for her jewellery and a golden belt, stalking the terrified Sylvia through the countryside. This sado-erotic hunting scene is the climax of the film, but Franco, operating as usual on some other frequency, allows dreaminess to defocus the action. Leisurely shots of Arno walking through the undergrowth contradict the buzzing frenzy of the library music score, running weird, dislocated detachment alongside adventure and adrenalin. On the other hand, the exterior scenes are replete with Franco's trademark zooms and slippage out-of-focus, which enhances the action with an immediacy far outweighing the technical inelegance. Style and content are strobing in and out of step with each other, but somehow the friction creates magic. As events reach a grim and sardonic conclusion, the Countess herself becomes a victim. Luckily, her gourmand husband can see the positive side: "*I've waited for this moment so long,*" says Zaroff. "*You will be the best meal of my life.*"

*Countess Perverse* is a genuinely exotic taste experience. Certain aspects are tough to swallow; others are weirdly delicious, a cine-epicurean's delight. While one can't help fantasising what might have been if the film had enjoyed a reasonable shooting schedule, the pleasures of *Countess Perverse* are intimately wrapped in its flagrant discontinuity and aesthetic arrhythmia. It really is dreamlike (that overworked word so hard to resist with Franco). Some scenes are vivid and elaborate, others garbled and threadbare. The dining sequences, the Zaroffs cutting up a corpse, the hallucinatory sea-journey, the image of Arno with a bow and arrow striding nude through the reeds and bushes; these aspects are indelible. In between, the material is so flimsy it can barely fill the gaps. A perplexing tangle of flaws and marvels, a dirt-encrusted jewel tossed aside half polished, this is utterly unlike the work of any other filmmaker.

**Music:** The soundtrack to *Countess Perverse*, culled from a variety of French library LPs, features some of the most exciting, compulsively listenable music in Franco's cinema. Among the tracks featured are: 'Violence' from *Distortions Pop* - Jean-Michel







Lorgère [aka 'H. Tical'] (Credits sequence); 'Crescendo City' from *Trafic Pop* - Jean-Michel Lorgère (Kali Hansa's molestation); 'Galop pour un 100 metres' from *Harlem Pop Trotters* - Jean-Bernard Raiteux (Sylvia, Tom, Moira in the sea); 'Strange Night' from *Trafic Pop* - Jean-Michel Lorgère, and 'Harlem Pop Trotters' from *Harlem Pop Trotters* - Jean-Bernard Raiteux (Sylvia making love with the Countess); 'Violence' from *Distortions Pop* - Jean-Michel Lorgère (Beginning of the hunt); 'Zombie' from *Sons nouveaux pour images contemporaines* - Roger Davy (The hunt continues...); 'Procession' from *Trafic Pop* - Jean-Michel Lorgère (Tom finds Sylvia's body); and 'Microchaos' from *Distortions Pop* - Jean-Michel Lorgère (the hunt). At least one organ piece reappears from *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein* but I can't identify the artist. Jean-Bernard Raiteux's music is also featured in *Sinner* and *The Demons*, both of which were made the previous year; sound editor Gérard Kikoïne was clearly fond of these LPs!

**Locations:** The Zaroffs live in Xanadu, part of the Manzanera housing complex in Calpe, Spain, previously seen in *She Killed in Ecstasy*. The interior staircase belongs to the neighbouring apartment block La Muralla Roja. For the Zaroffs' dining room, with its circular table and large circular windows, Franco went down to sea level, where a restaurant for the residents of the Manzanera complex overlooks the ocean ... The coastal region around Calpe has a few small islands, but many of the shots purporting to depict the Zaroffs' private island are actually mainland coastal locations: during the sea journey to the island, Franco includes a shot of the Peñón de Ifach at Calpe, which is actually on the mainland, giving those familiar with the region a bizarre sense of journeying simultaneously out to sea and back towards the coast ... The scene in which the Zaroffs explain to Sylvia how they will set her free and then hunt her down for sport takes place against a wall of mirrored tiles. These can also be seen in *How to Seduce a Virgin* (principally in the scene where Woods, Busselier, Arno and Romay play a sexual game of 'Dare' together).

**Connections:** With its theme of hunting humans and its blatant use of the name 'Zaroff', *Countess Perverse* explicitly references *The Most Dangerous Game* (1924) by Richard Connell, a short story turned into a film of the same name in 1932 starring British actor Leslie Banks. Connell's story describes an encounter between a big game hunter called Rainsford and another, General Zaroff, at the latter's isolated island castle. Zaroff reveals that he's grown bored of the animal kingdom and turned his attention to his own species; Rainsford, another hunter, will make the ultimate quarry. *Countess Perverse* ditches the battle of wits angle: General Zaroff becomes the Count Zaroff of the 1932 adaptation, and the victim who is chased during the film's extended climax is a helpless young woman not another hunter (Vernon's Zaroff being less of a Nietzschean than the original). Surprisingly for Franco, given his fondness for 'Igor' figures, the Zaroffs do not have a hulking sadistic manservant (in the original story he's a Cossack brute called Ivan, whom the quarry can choose to fight instead of

accepting Zaroff's challenge; none of them do). Most strikingly, of course, Franco adds cannibalism to the story, of which more in a moment. Connell's ending is changed completely: the short story focusses on the battle of wits between hunter and hunted to the very end, whilst Franco's version swerves to take in a failed rescue attempt, an unconvincing show of remorse from Bob, the Countess's death, and the Count's relish at the prospect of feeding on the flesh of his wife. Franco simply takes the basic idea of humans being hunted for sport and drops it into his world of sex and cruelty, emphasising the erotic component of the classic tale. Hunting is often used as a metaphor for predatory sexuality, and Franco draws out the implication, bringing the story into line with his contemporary Sadean adaptations ... Ernest Schoedsack and Irving Pichel's 1932 film of *The Most Dangerous Game* is only available today in a version that runs for just over an hour, which is frustrating because the original cut was almost fifteen minutes longer and reportedly included a lot more material in Count Zaroff's macabre 'trophy room', material that was then cut after an early screening because the horrified audience started walking out! Apparently, the sight of severed heads bobbing in glass tanks and preserved cadavers arranged in grisly tableaux-vivants proved too disturbing. Franco spreads these visual elements liberally across both *Countess Perverse* and its immediate predecessor *How to Seduce a Virgin*; in the former we get human heads mounted on the wall, in the latter we get tableaux-vivants of human victims. (By the way, notice that one of the human heads in Ivanna's trophy room is a prop recycled from *Virgin among the Living Dead*.) ... Franco returned to the 'hunting humans' theme in *Sadomania* (1980), in which Ajita Wilson chases victims across alligator infested swamps ... The scene in which the bound and gagged Kali watches Zaroff putting a corpse into the oven prefigures the killing of Pam in *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, with a trussed up victim forced to watch the butchery (and in this case the cookery) of another human being ... Cannibalism was very much in the news in the early months of 1973, due to the terrible experiences of passengers on Uruguayan Air Force Flight 571 which crashed in the Andes on 13 October 1972. The survivors, who were not rescued until 22 December 1972, revealed that they had been forced to resort to necro-cannibalism (eating the dead) to stay alive. The word 'cannibalism' itself comes from a Spanish root: the Spanish name for the Carib people of the West Indies is 'Canibales' and this tribe were often accused of cannibalism, although it's unclear whether it was practised for food or for magical purposes, the latter involving ritual chewing of a slain enemy's flesh. Franco's addition of cannibalism to the hunting motif of *The Most Dangerous Game* seems to have been spontaneous. However, it's worth pointing out that five years earlier the cannibalism taboo had been broken most shockingly in George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), which depicted such grisly delights as the recently dead feasting on burned human remains and a little girl eating the corpse of

her father. Immediately prior to *Countess Perverse*, cannibalism had featured in Umberto Lenzi's *Man from Deep River* (released in Italy in August 1972), Gary Sherman's *Death Line* (released in the UK in October 1972), Bud Townsend's *Terror at Red Wolf Inn* (released in the USA in October 1972), and Ivan Reitman's *Cannibal Girls* (released in the USA in April 1973).

**Other versions:** Franco's original cut of *Countess Perverse* did not sit well with producer Robert de Nesle. He was reportedly so disturbed by the film that he demanded Franco shoot new footage to soften the impact by adding light-hearted interludes and a happy ending. Franco, realising that if he didn't shoot the new material himself de Nesle would simply pay someone else to do so, reluctantly agreed. The resulting compromise came out under the flatly ridiculous title *Les Croqueuses* (literally, 'The Munchers'). Several months later, de Nesle asked Franco to add further scenes of an erotic nature to spice up *Les Croqueuses*. Franco once again agreed. He was evidently out of patience by now, though, because the additional erotic material ruins the pacing and totally scrambles the timeline, with Lina Romay molesting a bound couple in a scene that violates the story's chronology and flatly contradicts her ingénue role in the rest of the film! Here follows a list of all the additional scenes, totalling around twenty-four minutes:

1). A four-minute prologue on a hotel balcony, in which Sylvia (Lina Romay) and Carole (Caroline Rivière, Jess Franco's stepdaughter) chat about what to do on their holiday. Sylvia gets a call from her friend Tom (aka Bob in *Countess Perverse*), inviting her to join him, but Carole counsels caution, saying that she senses he's bad news.

2). Just under a minute of Sylvia and Carole in their hotel room. Sylvia responds with delight to a phone-call from 'Tom' inviting her to visit, whilst Carole sarcastically mimics her girlish enthusiasm. The material is divided into two shots of around twenty seconds each.

3). A softcore porn insert lasting approximately three minutes, in which Tom and Moira have sex (Tania Busselier plays Moira; an unknown stand-in plays Tom).

4). A scene lasting a minute and a half, in which Sylvia returns to her hotel room to pick up some clothes; Carole tries to dissuade her from going to the island with Tom. Romay's hair is noticeably longer here than it was for the original shoot. However, she's wearing the same dress that she wore in the verandah scene with Woods and Busselier in *Countess Perverse*: Romay obviously still had the outfit, and Franco took the trouble to match the footage.

5). A four-minute softcore sequence in which Countess Zaroff dallies with two captives in the cellar: one is Monica Swinn, the other is Tania Busselier. Senselessly, the scene is inserted immediately after we see Tom, Moira and Sylvia frolicking in the ocean, but *before* they enter the Zaroff house. Quite how Busselier can be swimming in the sea while simultaneously undergoing S&M dungeon sex with Countess Zaroff is a puzzle...

6). A softcore scene lasting roughly three and a half minutes in which Countess Zaroff makes out with a young man obviously intended to be Tom, although the fleetingly glimpsed actor bears no resemblance to Robert Woods.

7). A two-minute coda in which Carole, sitting by the pool, reads a frightening newspaper story and believes Sylvia has come to harm. Rushing back to the hotel room, she finds to her relief that her friend has fallen asleep and did not go to the island with Bob after all. "*I decided you were right. Bob is a real pig,*" Sylvia yawns. "*You don't know how much I love you,*" blurts Carole. The film ends on their affectionate embrace.

All of the material featuring Caroline Rivière and Lina Romay was shot later, at the seaside resort of La Grande Motte in 1974, during the making of *Lorna...the Exorcist* (the distinctive pyramidal structure of the resort's hotels can be seen in the background during the poolside scene of *Les Croqueuses*). Even the hotel room is the same as one used in *Lorna*; note the abstract art on the wall. The newspaper that Carole reads in the final scene bears the front-page headline "Georges Pompidou repose" ('Georges Pompidou rests'). This refers to the French President Georges Pompidou, who died suddenly on the 2nd of April 1974 and was buried on the 13th April. The headline relates to the burial, so the shoot must have occurred around that date. The newspaper is *Midi Libre*, a regional paper published in the Languedoc-Roussillon region.

There is also a *second* version of *Les Croqueuses* which adds one more snippet lasting just over five minutes. In it we see Romay, wearing a frilly dressing gown, entering a room and ravishing two bound figures, played by Pierre Taylou and a dyed-blond female (possibly *Exorcism's* Lynn Monteil). The scene veers briefly into (semi) hardcore when Romay takes Taylou's soft penis in her mouth. Once again, the insert violates the internal logic of *Countess Perverse* by having Romay, who plays the innocent Sylvia, turning up in a completely unrelated role as a sadistic seductress! These shots were filmed in the Palácio Conde Castro Guimarães, in Cascais, Portugal, possibly during the summer 1974 shoot for *Les Chatouilleuses*.

Although *Les Croqueuses* is a much more chaotic and compromised film than *Countess Perverse*, we can still glean a few insights from the extra material. For instance, the dynamic between Sylvia/Romay and Carole/Rivière is worth unpacking, as it seems to me surprisingly loaded. Rivière plays a serious, rather sombre soul who's writing a book whilst on vacation; Romay plays a cheerful sceptic, who dismisses the darkness and depravity Rivière seems to perceive everywhere. One could speculate that their relationship mirrors that of Franco and Romay, or if not, then perhaps the warring drives of Thanatos and Eros in Franco himself. In the opening scene on the hotel balcony, Carole reads aloud from her notepad: "*At that moment, with icy hands the monster descended, attacking Melissa's body...*" (Melissa of course is a frequent name used in Franco's scripts, beginning with *The*

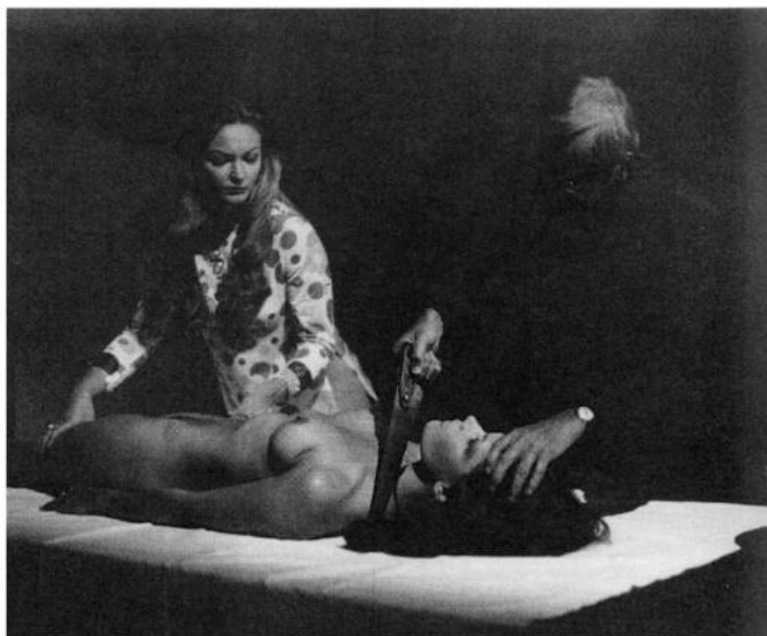
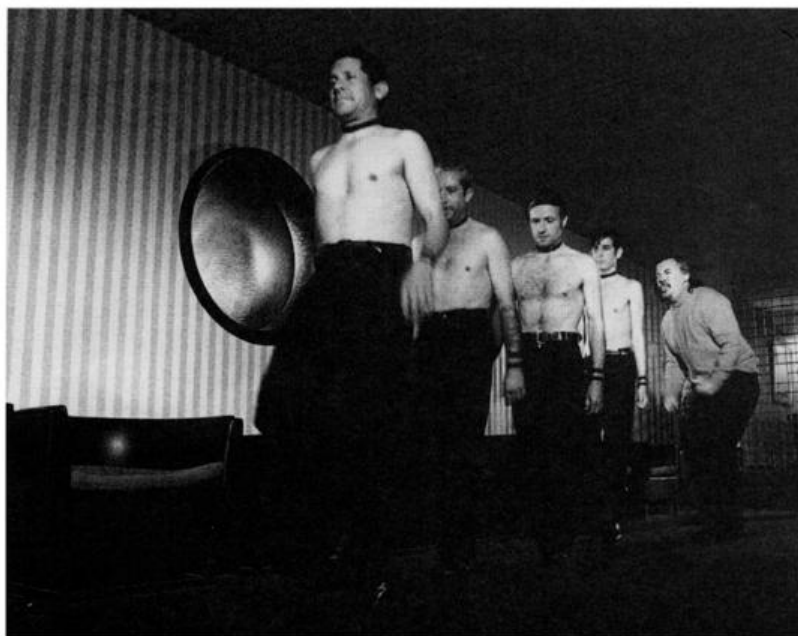




*This picture: Lina Romay delivers the UK censor's favourite 'trigger image', blood on breasts, in the unreleased El misterio del castillo rojo.*

*Below, left: Jess Franco (doubled over) and a troupe of male goons in El misterio del castillo rojo.*

*Below right: The Zaroffs (Howard Vernon & Alice Arno) get to work filleting another catch (Kali Hansa) in Countess Perverse.*



*Awful Dr. Orlof*). When Carole mentions her new book, Sylvia says mockingly, “You mean your new trash! Full of demons, horrors, screams, and everything like that...” “Have a little respect for my art, please” says Carole, her tone slightly aggrieved but dripping with irony. In another pointed exchange, Sylvia counters Carole’s doubts about Tom by launching into a critique of her obsession with the dark side: “You’re wrong. Tom is a true friend. He’s affectionate and nice. Even his wife is fascinating. They are a beautiful couple. But you see only monsters, demons! Vultures searching for death! Vampires, sick creatures. You don’t see beauty at all. Homicidal maniacs, killers, perverts, low-lives. That’s all you understand!” Once again, the exchange is interesting because Carole’s obsession with “killers, perverts and low-lives” maps very easily onto Jess Franco himself. At the time this additional scene was shot, Franco and Romay were also making *Lorna... the Exorcist*, one of Franco’s darkest films. Perhaps significantly, they followed it with three comedies in a row; the nunsplottation farce *Les Chatouilleuses*, the playboy-on-the-prowl bedroom comedy *Le Jouisseur*, and the crime caper *Les Grandes Emmerdeuses*. Given Romay’s oft-stated preference for comedy roles, perhaps Sylvia in *Les Croqueuses* speaks for her? It’s also worth remembering that the reason these lighter scenes were being shot in the first place is because producer Robert de Nesle found the depravity of *Countess Perverse* too heavy for his tastes, so one could in fact say that Sylvia is the mouthpiece for accusations levelled at Franco by his producer! Of course Franco can allow these snipes at his morbidity because, as it turns out, Carole is right about Tom!

The hotel-room sequence in the middle of the film sees Franco revelling in his own magpie cheek. “You’re playing a dangerous game,” says Carole, quoting the title of the Richard Connell story from which the plot is pilfered. When Sylvia says that Tom is taking her to a remote island to meet his rich friends, Carole is agitated: “Don’t you think you should know more before you go? Especially to an island. It could be dangerous. Anything could happen to you. Rape, abuse by sadists...” Of course, this essentially sums up the plot of the film we’re watching! Warming to her theme, Carole insists, “Sylvia, remember the Island of Dr. Moreau? The island of Fu Manchu? The island of Count Zaroff?” – at which point the film is seconds away from serving us a juicy modernist rump steak carved from its own backside!

Finally, it’s necessary to mention the Italian theatrical release, *Sexy Nature*. Although I haven’t seen this variant, it reportedly features twenty minutes of hardcore sex not directed by Franco<sup>2</sup>. This additional hardcore material is *not* included, however, in the version released on DVD by Tonfilm as *Sexy Nature*, which despite the title is actually just the second version of *Les Croqueuses* described above.

**Problematica:** Some sources state that both Lynn Monteil and Chantal Broquet appear in the additional sex scenes in *Les Croqueuses*, however this remains unconfirmed (although my money’s on Monteil in the scene with Pierre Taylou...).

## EL MISTERIO DEL CASTILLO ROJO

[Unreleased]

“The Mystery of the Red Castle”

**Spain 1973**

*Alternative titles*

**El castillo rojo** (shooting/script title)

*Production company*

**Films Manacoa P.C.** (Madrid)

*Timeline*

Partial shooting date      circa May      1973

**Cast:** Yelena Samarina (Frieda). Kali Hansa (Furia). Alberto Dalbés. Jess Franco (Ferenck Radek). Lina Romay. Manuel Pereiro. Mario Alex. Montserrat Prous.

**Credits:** director: Jess Franco. producer: Antonio Cervera García. screenplay: Jess Franco. director of photography: Javier Pérez Zofio.

**Production notes:** *El misterio del castillo rojo* was probably filmed just after *Countess Perverse* (simultaneously, perhaps, given that it shares the central location), and for the third time in his career Franco stalled a movie. It was planned as a Manacoa production, with Antonio Cervera García credited as producer in the *Cineinforme* production listing, which also notes that an authorisation to shoot was granted on 6 June 1973. Apparently a crazy sci-fi action comedy full of parodic dialogue and camp situations, with horny detectives, human automatons, and villains bent on world domination, it sounds like a gumbo of elements from *Attack of the Robots* and *The Girl from Rio*. Yelena Samarina, Kali Hansa and Alberto Dalbés were signed to appear, and shooting did actually commence – but was the film ever completed? In a 2009 interview with Álex Mendibil, Franco declared: “*El castillo rojo* was never finished. I started to shoot at the end of another movie but never could finish it. Partly it was shot in a residential area of Calpe by Ricardo Bofill, a fucking great site. I played the villain.” However, as with the earlier *Relax Baby*, Lina Romay’s recollection was different; speaking to journalist Kevin Collins she said it was finished but unreleased.<sup>1</sup>

Thanks to a few enticing stills we know that shooting took place. But when exactly? Alain Petit, who first met Franco on 2 February 1973, remembers being shown stills from *El misterio del castillo rojo* at that first meeting, along with others from *Un silencio de tumba* and *Sinner*. However, Romay’s recollection puts the film after *Countess Perverse* (shot at the end of April 1973). In addition, a script has turned up dated March 1973. It therefore seems possible that this was one of Franco’s ‘patchwork’ productions, in which case both



Petit and Romay could be right. Perhaps some material was shot in late 1972, after which the project lay fallow for a few months until Franco finalised a script in March and mounted a second shoot circa May 1973? As to whether the film was ever finished, it seems that this will always remain one of the mysteries of the red castle...

**Locations:** Shooting took place at 'La Muralla Rojo' in Calpe, with some material shot at a location previously seen in *El muerto hace las maletas* (the interior wall with porthole style windows, depicted in one of only two surviving stills from *El castillo*, can also be seen in the Flamingo Club scenes from the earlier film).

#### Timeline

Shooting	June	1973
UK 'X' certificate issued	25 February	1974
France*	20 March	1974
French visa issued	29 March	1974
UK	circa July	1974
Italy (Florence)	14 October	1976

\* some sources say 15 May 1974

#### Theatrical running time

France	70m/74m
UK running time	61m00s (submitted at 64m38s)

## THE LUSTFUL AMAZON

France 1973

French visa number: 41966

*Original theatrical title in country of origin*

**Maciste contre la reine des Amazones** (FR)

*Maciste Against the Queen of the Amazons*

*Alternative titles*

**Les Amazones de la luxure** (FR alt. theatrical)

*The Amazons of Lust*

**Maciste aux mains des amazones nues** (BEL? alt. theatrical\*)

*Maciste In the Hands of the Naked Amazons*

**Karzan contro le donne dal seno nudo** (IT theatrical)

*Karzan Against the Topless Women*

**Amazonlara Karşı** (TUR theatrical) *Against the Amazons*

**Aska Doymayan Canavar** (TUR alt. theatrical)

*Insatiable Monster in Love*

**Mädchen die sich Lieben Lassen** (GER theatrical)

*Let the Girl Be Loved*

**De wulpse Amazones** (BEL video) *Lascivious Amazons*

**Wulpse Amazones** (NL video) *Lascivious Amazons*

**Amazones** (NL 'Converge Video' spine and front cover title)

**Yuka** (FR video)

**Amazon Women** (BBFC - film delivery document)

**The Lustful Amazons** (BBFC document)

**Lustful Amazons** (BBFC document)

\*I could find no record of a Belgian release at the Belgium Cinematek Library.

*Production company*

**Comptoir Français du Film Production** (Paris)

*Theatrical distributors*

**Comptoir Français du Film Production** (Paris)

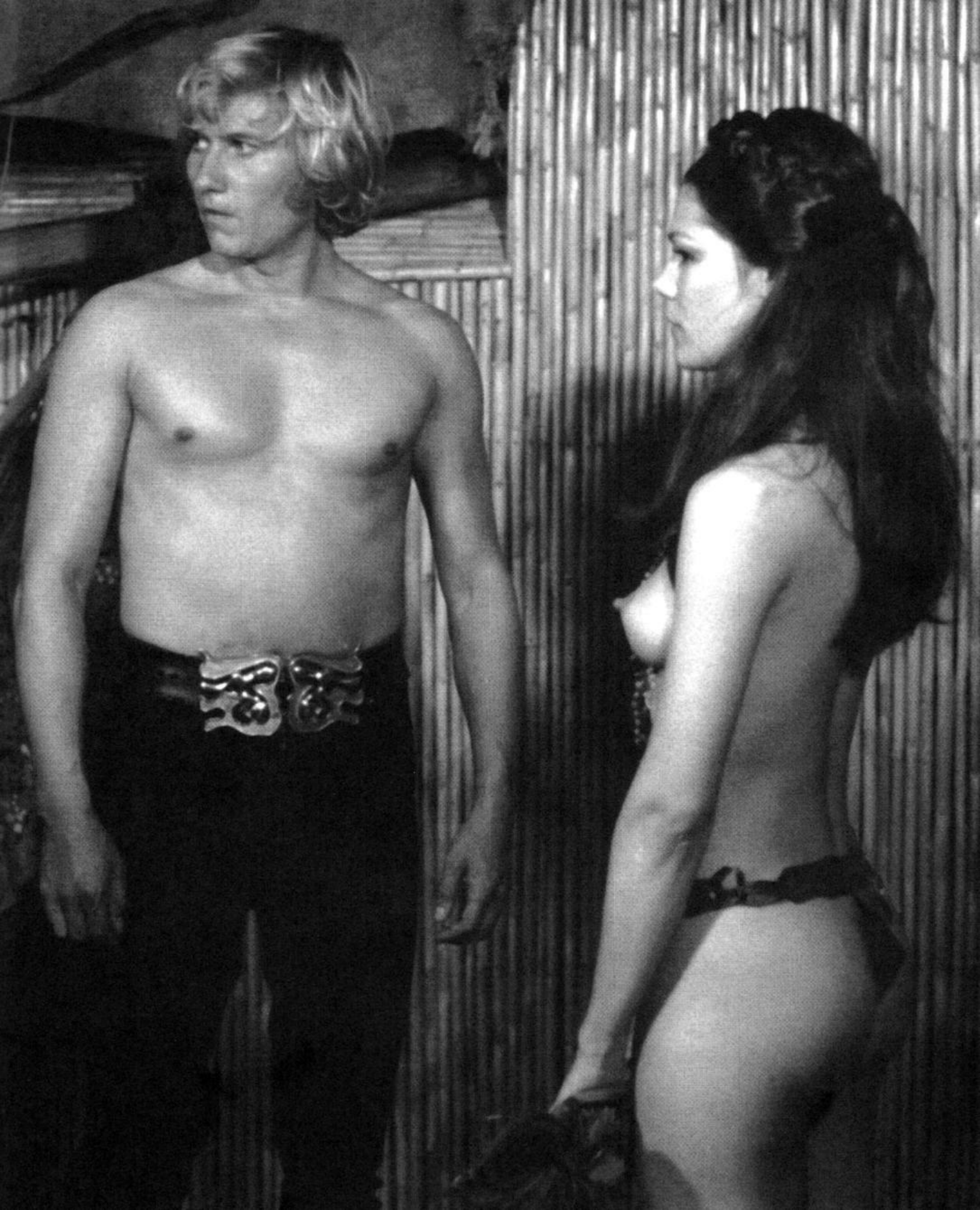
**Cinecenta Film Distributors** (London)

**Cast:** **Wal Davis** (Maciste/Karzan). **Alice Arno** (Arminda, queen of the Amazons). **Robert Woods** (Pygar/Pindar). **Kali Hansa** (Turia, the queen's handmaiden). **Montie [Montserrat] Proux** (Lucia/Lizia, daughter of the old sorceress). **Lina Romay** (Yuka, the priestess). **Chantal Broquet** (Marcia). [Roger Sarbib credited onscreen but not visible in available prints.]

**Credits:** director: **Jess Franco**. screenplay & adaptation: **Jess Franco**. director of photography: **Gérard Brissaud**. editor: **Gérard Kikoïne**. music: **Robert Viger**. presenter [i.e. producer]: **Robert de Nesle**. continuity: **Simone Leguillon**. still photography: **Howard Vernon** [as 'Mario Lippert']. assistant editor: **Patrick Deconinck**. film stock: **Kodak Eastmancolor**. laboratory: **L.T.C.** (Saint Cloud). sound recordist: **Michel Condo**.

**Synopsis:** *The adventurer Pygar tells the heroic and mighty Maciste of his recent encounter with a jungle tribe of man-hungry Amazonian women. He paints a picture of unlimited sex and mentions that a great treasure is hidden in the vicinity. Maciste sets off to discover these pleasures and riches for himself, unaware that Pygar had struck a deal with Queen Arminda to deliver Maciste as a sex slave, whose virility she will exploit to save her dying race. Maciste finds himself forced into sexual servitude. Pygar is recaptured too, but he's set free by tribeswoman Marcia, who has fallen love with him, and the priestess Yuka, who's jealous because the Queen desires Maciste. Together they set off to steal the treasure, but Marcia is killed by the Queen's eunuch archers. Maciste, giving chase, must do battle with a strange werewolf creature who guards the treasure.*

**Production notes:** June 1973 saw Franco embark on a three-month stint of shooting on the island of Madeira, beginning with a brace of adventure films, *Maciste contre la reine des Amazones* and *Les Exploits érotiques de Maciste dans l'Atlantide*. Although they're among the cheapest and quickest productions of the period, everyone involved is clearly having a ball making them, basking in the essential silliness of the notion that these are peplums in the tradition of the Italian muscleman epics. *Maciste contre la reine des Amazones* is hilarious though fractionally more conventional while







*Les Exploits érotiques de Maciste dans l'Atlantide* is further out, with a genuinely dislocated aura of mystery that somehow transcends the cheapjack technical credits. The two films are among Franco's daftest and most delirious efforts, and will guarantee you a black eye if you recommend them to outsiders, but for Franco obsessives who enjoy tracking the spore of his mad creativity wherever it may lead, they're both rather wonderful...

**Review:** By the time Jess Franco essayed this bizarre 'Maciste' film in the summer of 1973, the muscleman epic or 'peplum' had been out of fashion for nearly a decade. An Italian phenomenon that swept across Europe in the sixties, the peplum offered bulging muscle, heroic deeds, slinky femme-fatales, and a thrilling admixture of myth, history and comic-strip. Maciste and his brothers in brawn, Samson, Goliath and Hercules, bestrode the Italian cinema between 1959 and 1965, attracting huge popular audiences and providing material for such diverse filmmaking talents as Mario Bava, Riccardo Freda, Vittorio Cottafavi, Sergio Corbucci, Umberto Lenzi and Giorgio Ferroni. Then, as suddenly as it had begun, the muscleman boom died, to be replaced by the late 1960s superspy craze, the turn-of-the-seventies giallo boom, the hardboiled crime thrillers of the mid-1970s, and the zombie-cannibal gutmunchers of the early 1980s. Such is the way of the commercial Italian cinema, in which popular forms are driven to their limit before being abandoned like so much junk.

So why did producer Robert de Nesle stump up the cash for Jess Franco to revisit such a moribund genre? The key is in the title: not 'Maciste' but 'Amazons'. Luscious dominant women in their primal habitat, turning man-mountain Maciste into their helpless love slave; this is the sales pitch that made de Nesle's eyes roll back and his cheque book pop out. I would love to have seen his face when he viewed the results. On paper it sounds like a sizzling erotic experience; on film, through the camera of Jesús Franco, it's just a weird, dislocated, semi-comprehensible hoot. I'm personally glad that Franco bamboozled de Nesle into bankrolling this film, as the perversity of the project is its greatest charm. His take on Maciste is an extraordinary comic coda to the muscleman phenomenon. Basically, the testosterone mightiness one expects from the peplum is nowhere to be found. Anyone excited by the prospect of some Spanish He-Man bestriding ancient lands like a muscled colossus must prepare themselves instead for a flouncy, floppy-shirted version of the cinema icon, who looks more like a vacationing Romantic poet than a tower of masculine power. Maciste is played by the likeable but hardly butch actor Wal Davis in the style of a gentle renaissance explorer, wandering the Earth in search of interesting tales and new ideas. Frankly, you wouldn't turn to him for help in a bar brawl, never mind a war with the Barbarian hordes or a fight to the death with a giant eagle. The only gargantuan feature of the film is its implausibility. Franco doesn't give a damn for realism, that much is clear from the jungle hang-out of the Amazon tribe, a woodland vacation resort complete with

log huts so efficiently constructed one expects to see the Ikea logo stamped on them. His poker-faced willingness to insist upon an illusion that stands not a chance of fooling anybody is one of his most endearing traits. The film is so wackily unconvincing it feels like it was done for a bet. There's an air of fun about it: during a bizarre scene in which Maciste communicates with the Amazon tribeswomen by *whistling*, you can see Wal Davis grinning at the absurdity. No one takes the proceedings remotely seriously, least of all Robert Woods who mugs shamelessly. At one point, fulfilling the politically incorrect requirements of lesbian erotica aimed at men, Franco shows two 'Amazonians' having a cat-fight: Woods jumps in and screws them, quipping, "*That's better, huh?*" In any other context it would seem the height of crassness. Here, you simply roll your eyes and laugh; getting angry with this film is like causing a stink because a toddler threw jelly at a children's tea party.

The highlight of the film is a five-minute sequence in which Maciste's legendary strength and stamina are put to the ultimate test. Alice Arno as the imperious Amazonian Queen decrees that Maciste should impregnate the entire tribe, and a queue of eager women take turns straddling him, until the captured hero is driven half-insane with pleasure and exhaustion. Accompanied by frantic music whipping up the mood of sexual provocation, this priceless scene delivers what all those straight-faced Italian encounters between Maciste and various 'women of the moon' or 'Queens of Moloch' hinted at but never provided - the chance to see insatiable females take their pleasure with 'the greatest man who ever lived'. However it must be said that the erotic charge would have been just a tad more intense if the hero had been a genuine muscleman! Poor old Wal Davis looks as though he'd be drained after five minutes with a dirty video, never mind an entire tribe of Amazonian lovelies.

But wait, there's more. We still haven't discussed the campest Maciste moment ever conceived, in which our champion challenges Queen Arminda to a fight to the death. The ensuing battle between the mightiest man in the world, nude, with his thoroughly average penis dangling in the breeze, and a warrior queen who can't even unsheathe her knife without a struggle, is truly unforgettable. As Davis and Arno circle warily, trying to knock each other over as painlessly as possible, the fight swiftly deteriorates into bathos. The Queen punches Maciste ineffectually in the chest while he flexes his mediocre pecs and grins like a smug ten year old. Queen Arminda falls to the ground in defeat and Maciste reclaims his pride by screwing her in front of the handmaidens, before beating his scrawny chest with his fists and skipping off into the forest - a timeless man of myth perhaps ever so *slightly* reduced in our eyes, and a whole lot lighter in the balls...

**Cast and crew:** Wal Davis, real name Waldemar Wohlfahrt, was a playboy from Stuttgart, whose first claim to fame, of a sort, came at the end of the 1960s when he was accused of being a mass murderer - the 'Highway Serial Killer' or 'Highway Vampire' - by the West German tabloids. He was caught by Spanish police officers in Alicante, Spain, but during his trial was cleared of all suspicion

and received 50,000 deutschmarks compensation from the press. However, he was subsequently re-arrested on a charge of being a pimp and this time found himself in jail for a couple of months. Upon his release in 1970, and with the remaining compensation money, he started a film production company and produced *The Horrible Sexy Vampire* (aka *El vampiro de la autopista*) with his fiancée, actress Ada Tauler. Wohlfahrt took the starring role as the 'Highway Vampire', a certain Count Oblensky, and the film was partly shot at the actual locations in Germany where the killings took place. (Thanks to Uwe Huber and Guiskard Oberparleiter for this fascinating story, relayed to them by Franco himself.) Three years later both he and Ada Tauler wound up in the orbit of Jess Franco: Wohlfahrt appeared in the director's back-to-back brace of Maciste films, and both he and Tauler took roles in the next Franco film in line, *Al otro lado del espejo*. The two of them also popped up four years later in the Women-in-Prison film *Love Camp* (1977), directed by Franco for Swiss producer Erwin Dietrich.

**Music:** Composed mainly of generic cues for tribal drums, bongos, vibraphone and marimba, with the occasional thumb piano, this is not one of Franco's more interesting soundtracks. The only standout piece is the one which accompanies Maciste's 'gang rape', featuring a demented three note pattern played insistently at ridiculous speed over Wal Davis's absurd facial contortions.

**Locations:** Shot in some bushes on the island of Madeira; due to the absence of recognisable architecture, landmarks or coastline it's impossible to be more precise.

**UK release:** As *The Lustful Amazon* this received an 'X' certificate from the BBFC on the 25th February 1974. By August of 1974 the film was in circulation in British sex cinemas, distributed by Cinecenta, who subsequently teamed it up with an earlier Franco title, *The Demons*, on a double bill at venues such as Birmingham's Cinephone in February 1975. Note: although submitted to the BBFC as *The Lustful Amazon*, the film was referred to in a feature in *Continental Film Review* as *Lustful Amazons*. See Appendix for more details of the censored version.

**Connections:** Robert Woods's character Pygar takes his name from John Philip Law's iconic angel in *Barbarella* (1968) ... Pygar and Yuka, his Amazon floozy (Lina Romy), try to steal the tribe's treasure, only to be skewered by Queen Arminda, played by Alice Arno wielding a bow and arrow, echoing her role as Countess Zaroff in *Countess Perverse* ... Somewhere in the depths of the forest, and the comforting darkness of the surviving video transfer, Maciste is attacked by a werewolf. Yes, that's right, a werewolf. Could it be 'Candy', the same actor who turns up unexpectedly in *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein*?

**Other versions:** I'm currently unaware of any significant variants; the Italian version is likely to be the same as the original French theatrical. *Maciste contre la reine des Amazones* survives today thanks to a couple of a blurry VHS releases from the early 1980s; appearing on video shelves as *Yuka* in France, and *Karzan contro le donne dal seno nudo* in Italy, the latter taking its bowdlerized cue

from Demofilo Fidani's 1972 adventure *Karzan, il favoloso uomo della jungla*. (Various Italian rip-offs of Edgar Rice Burroughs's Tarzan stories were bankrolled in the 1960s and 70s, with the lead character's name changed to Karzan, Karzak and Zambo to avoid litigation.) The UK version will simply have been the French original shorn of its sexy scenes.

**Problematica:** The IMDb currently adds the following incorrect cast members: Richard Bigotini, Caroline Rivière and Pamela Stanford.

**Press coverage:** In the BFI's journal of record *The Monthly Film Bulletin*, Verina Glaessner witheringly described the film as, "Surely the most debilitated offshoot of the Maciste series: minor league nudity in a distinctly European garden is meant to stand in for the exotica of an 'Amazonian' jungle, and a solitary pathetic carving and nightlight are intended to summon up images of wild ritual and abandon."<sup>1</sup>

## LES GLOUTONNES

*The Gluttons*

**France 1973**

French visa number: 41967

*Original title (release unconfirmed)*

**Les Exploits érotiques de Maciste dans l'Atlantide** (FR)

*The Erotic Exploits of Maciste in Atlantis*

*Alternative titles*

**Yaz Tomurcuklari** (TUR theatrical) *Summer Buds*

**Maciste et les gloutonnes** (FR video) *Maciste and the Gluttons*

**Les Vierges de l'Atlantide** (FR video) *The Virgins of Atlantis*

*Unconfirmed titles*

**Sexes au soleil** (FR alt. theatrical [OB]) *Sex in the Sun*

*Production company*

**Comptoir Français du Film Production** (Paris)

*Theatrical distributors*

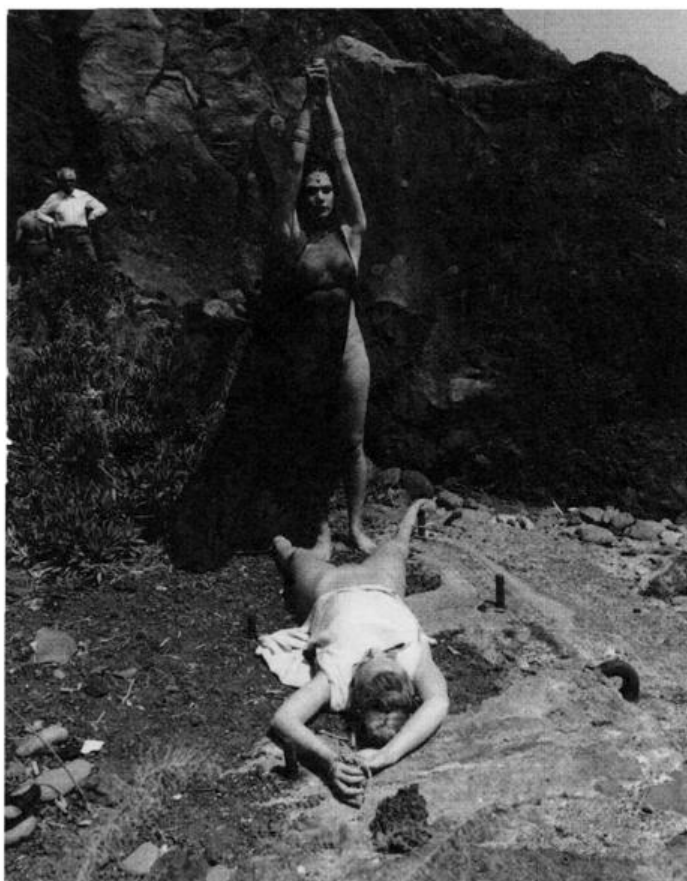
**Comptoir Français du Film Production** (Paris)

*Timeline*

Shooting	circa June/July	1973
French visa issued ( <i>Les Gloutonnes</i> )	10 September	1974
France	05 February	1975

*Theatrical running time*

France	74m
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from Les Gloutonnes...

Above, and this picture: Parqua (Kali Hansa) prepares to sacrifice Queen Arminda (Alice Arno). Note: the unknown onlookers in the background of the first shot are not characters in the story.

Marie, the Queen's handmaiden (Montserrat Prous), menaced by Caronte, in a scene from Les Exploits érotiques de Maciste dans l'Atlantide missing from Les Gloutonnes.

The Atlanteans' greatest enemy, Caronte (Robert Woods), assists Parqua in summoning the cult of Panthos.







**Cast:** **Wal Davis** (Maciste). **Alice Arno** (the reader/Rose, Queen of Atlantis). **Robert Woods** (Caronte, the Queen's enemy). **Montie [Montserrat] Prous** (Marie, the Queen's blind handmaiden). **Lina Romay** (Bianca). **Chantal Broquet** (Purpure). **Roger Sarbib** [credited onscreen but not visible in any available prints]. **Kali Hansa** (Parqua, a mystic). *uncredited:* **Howard Vernon** (Cagliostro the magician). **Bigotini** (Bigotini, Cagliostro's butler). **Caroline Rivière** (1st temptress conjured up by Bigotini). **Pamela Stanford** (2nd temptress conjured up by Bigotini).

**Credits:** director: **Jess Franco**. screenplay & adaptation: **Jess Franco**. director of photography: **Gérard Brissaud**. editor: **Gérard Kikoïne**. music: **Robert Viger**. presenter [i.e. producer]: **Robert de Nesle**. continuity: **Simone Leguillon**. still photography: **Howard Vernon** [as 'Mario Lippert']. assistant editor: **Patrick Deconinck**. film stock: **Kodak Eastmancolor**. laboratory: **L.T.C.** (Saint Cloud). sound recordist: **Michel Condo**.

**Synopsis:** *Three levels of reality, three separate time-streams. The present day, medieval times, and a mythic realm just after the sinking of Atlantis. In the present, in her boudoir at night, a woman reads a novel about an island paradise populated by survivors of the destruction of Atlantis. In her imaginings she becomes the Queen of this civilisation; in her bed, at various times, anonymous men and women make love to her. In medieval times, an adventurer called Caronte is enlisted by Parqua, a female sorcerer, to help her take control of the Atlanteans. The medieval magician Cagliostro and his assistant Bigotini observe both the present and the mythic past through a magical gourd. Cagliostro appears to the traveller and Renaissance adventurer Maciste, and tells him that his services are needed by the Atlanteans. Maciste follows a guide sent by Cagliostro, a young nymph called Bianca. The two of them swim to the Atlanteans' island, where Maciste is introduced to Rose, Queen of Atlantis. She tells him that in an attempt to depose her, Caronte and Parqua have blocked a magical fountain of love which sustains the islanders. She begs him to save her people by defeating Caronte; Maciste responds by making love to her. Cagliostro summons Bianca into his reality and has sex with her. Bigotini also uses magic to find himself a girl; two females appear and tickle him mercilessly. Meanwhile, on the island, Queen Rose's sister Purpure is jealous of the relationship with Maciste; she betrays them to Caronte and Parqua. The Queen's blind handmaiden Marie tells Maciste that danger is imminent. Meanwhile, as Bigotini commands the two women to dematerialise, he looks into Cagliostro's crystal ball and sees Caronte, who has abducted the Queen and is carrying her off to be sacrificed. Alarmed, Bigotini summons his Master. Maciste is distracted from the encroaching danger because he's falling in love with Marie. As the couple kiss, Bianca raises the alarm and the three head off to find the Queen. Caronte and Parqua prepare the sacrifice; as the ritual progresses, shrouded figures emerge from the rocks and converge on the ceremony. Maciste pushes Caronte into an abyss but too late; Parqua kills the Queen. Bianca rushes forward and stabs*

*Parqua. Hand in hand with Bianca and Marie, Maciste sets off to seek out new adventures. In the present day, the woman who thought herself Queen writhes in erotic frustration...*

**Review:** Arising from the murky mists of Madeira, and accompanied by the tendrils of André Benichou's psychedelically wistful guitar theme, this second Maciste adventure takes us into one of the most obscure and magical valleys in Jess Franco's cinema. For me it's a place of pure pleasure, but for anyone who has not yet been bitten by the Franco bug, this is just about as impenetrable and off-putting as it gets: softcore erotica masquerading as a Maciste adventure film, available only in an atrocious French-language print swarming with scratches, and conveyed via a typically awful Secam video transfer. Inflict it on the uninitiated and you'll make enemies fast. For adepts, however, it's a different matter. *Les Exploits érotiques de Maciste dans l'Atlantide* (in the form of its only surviving relic *Les Gloutonnes*) is replete with mad pleasures. A talking gourd, a reappearance from Howard Vernon's medieval magician Cagliostro (last seen in *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein*), unpredictably inserted female writhing scenes, the hero of a thousand Italian muscleman epics poncing around the forest in a frilly shirt like a vacationing Romantic poet, psychedelic music, a tickling scene, lots of echoed groaning... *Les Gloutonnes* will excite the committed Francophile, and alienate everyone else.

It's impossible to discuss the film without acknowledging its weirdness and incoherence. For a start, the 'sexy' elements are so arbitrarily placed, and so extraordinarily out of step with the rest of the film, that one simply gives up trying to address the result as a single coherent experience. The original cut, *Les Exploits érotiques de Maciste dans l'Atlantide*, has never turned up, so all we have to go on is *Les Gloutonnes*, a sexed up variant cut together from three different shoots. The ingredients are as follows: approximately forty minutes of location shooting on the island of Madeira, depicting Maciste (Wal Davis) and the Queen of Atlantis (Alice Arno) pitted against the mercenary Caronte (Robert Woods) and a wicked Sorceress (Kali Hansa); around twelve minutes of the sorcerer Cagliostro (Vernon) and his apprentice Bigotini (Bigotini), observing the rest of the film from a Gaudi-esque attic space through the auspices of a crystal ball; and a framing device featuring approximately thirty minutes of Alice Arno as a modern-day reader of fantastic fiction daydreaming that she is the Queen of Atlantis, while being pleased by a variety of faceless visitors. The resulting hotchpotch veers between ridiculous pantomime and dreamlike beauty: the island-location photography looks quite lovely at times, all things considered, but Franco is very much at the helm and the hand-held zooming and panning will inevitably aggravate his critics. The interludes with Vernon and Bigotini are played for farce but they're amusing and surreal enough to justify inclusion, while the sexy writhings of the 'present-day' Alice Arno character are simultaneously mesmerising and droopily tedious (please don't ask me how that's possible...).

If anything it's Cagliostro who knits the disparate elements together, not Alice Arno's character, and certainly not poor old Maciste. Cagliostro appears to be aware of both the other time-streams; we see him interact with Maciste, and gaze into his crystal ball at Alice Arno's present day writhings, so I guess that puts him at the top of the tree, metaphysically speaking. Then again, he's enclosed at both ends by the framing footage of Arno reading a fantasy about Atlantis; so can his reality really be the topmost layer? In one scene, near the beginning, we see Cagliostro actually *inside* Maciste's reality: are we to suppose, then, that Cagliostro is entering a *fictional* world from the vantage point of an exterior reality? Or is he resident in the same reality as Maciste but separated only in time? If the latter, which seems more likely, then the female reader's reality and Cagliostro's reality are indeed separate, but hers contains his, and his contains hers. Far out!

As you might expect, Franco's Atlantis is a very odd place. It's feudal, pre-technological, undeniably primitive, and yet the Queen wears huge leather platform shoes plucked from the trendiest boutiques in 1970s Paris. Arno looks fantastic in the role, her hair a pseudo-Grecian torrent, her eye make-up exaggerating her already feline features. She and her subjects appear to live on a beach, wandering like ghosts around rock pools and cliffside vistas. Stairs are hewn into cinder rocks (Madeira is volcanic in origin), giving us at least a sliver of a sense that this is the seat of some lost civilisation, but as for houses, temples and the like, forget it. Remember, this is a post-Apocalyptic Atlantean story, with a few survivors clinging to the rocks of a neighbouring island trying to eke out their remaining years. How typical of Franco, to make a film about Atlantis just *after* it has sunk irretrievably from view!

There's not a great deal going on plot-wise, but that's hardly news in Franco's filmography. *Les Gloutonnes* is yet another marvellous mood-piece, Jess Franco's equivalent of a soothing hit of valium, so if you're craving that woozy Franco magic, then believe me, Doctor Jess is in his dispensary and all is well with the world. Never for a moment would you rate it as one of his best efforts, yet somehow it feels soaked in the weird spirit of his finest work (it's as if *Les Gloutonnes* has been stored for years between leaky prints of *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein* and *Countess Perverse*, ending up stained with the fluids of its betters). It's ambient Franco, completely detached from the real world. Put it on to watch the next time you're convalescing from an illness. I guarantee that afterwards you'll find it almost impossible to explain what actually happens. It's not a 'real film', more like a wander through a misty garden, with no plan, no structure, no distracting sense of a narrative hounding you with details. It resists analysis and just hovers there, like a hypnogogic mirage. Think too hard and it'll dissolve into specifics, turn into a load of softcore groping, a bargain-basement cornball adventure. Better to let it be, and enjoy this abstract marvel without reflection.

**Music:** André Benichou's themes for electric guitar and bass are dreamily psychedelic, occupying a similar contemplative space to

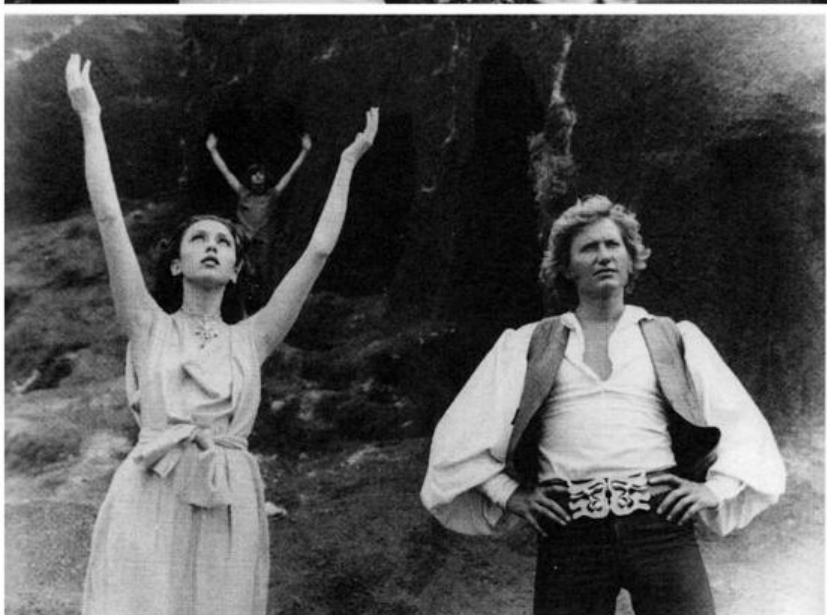
the albums of Focus, a Dutch band who had instrumental hits in the UK with two 45s, the demented 'Hocus Pocus' (1971) and the drivingly elegiac 'Sylvia' (1972). Similarities also abound in Benichou's score to the popular 'Fado' genre of Portuguese music, in particular the work of Carlos Paredes. Benichou's cues were obviously added in 1974 when *Les Exploits érotiques de Maciste dans l'Atlantide* became *Les Gloutonnes* - they accompany all of the additional material but none of the original footage. *Les Exploits érotiques de Maciste dans l'Atlantide* - or what's left of it - is scored quite differently, relying on some rather wonderful orchestral jazz reminiscent of Miles Davis's *Sketches of Spain* (a favourite album of Jess Franco's), and a selection of library tracks for flute and strings that sound like the sort of old-Hollywood fluff Andy Milligan might have pilfered for *The Ghastly Ones*.

**Locations:** Porto Moniz, northwest of Funchal on the Madeiran coastline, chiefly the large open-air swimming pool formed out of natural rock pools, accessed by stairs carved into the rocks.

**Connections:** *Les Exploits érotiques de Maciste dans l'Atlantide* is a companion-piece to *Maciste contre la reine des Amazones* - the two were shot back to back, with the Atlantis film apparently made as a gift from Franco to Robert de Nesle ... Cagliostro, last seen driving his carriage into the ocean at the end of *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein*, reappears, once again played by Howard Vernon. The white-sheeted figures who walk along the beach at Cagliostro's behest towards the 'climax' of *Les Gloutonnes* also feature in *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein*.

**Other versions:** *Les Gloutonnes* runs approximately 85 minutes, of which close to 30 minutes were lensed after the main shoot on Madeira. Filmed in late 1973 or early 1974, the extra material includes numerous shots of Alice Arno and two shadowy lovers. Some sources list the film at 75 minutes; perhaps this was the length of *Les Exploits érotiques de Maciste dans l'Atlantide*? If so, we're missing around twenty minutes! It's been suggested that there was only ever forty minutes worth of footage shot for *Les exploits érotiques de Maciste dans l'Atlantide*, with Franco adding new material later to turn it into something releasable. However, as *all* of the Madeiran material is scored with library music, while the present-day material is scored with André Benichou's jazz-rock, it seems to me possible that the Madeira shoot resulted in a finished, scored and edited feature that was then cut to make room for the present-day footage (see the stills captions opposite). Note too that everyone in the scenes featuring Cagliostro (Vernon, Bigotini, Stanford and Rivière) goes uncredited. Were their scenes added later also? ... As she writhes on her bedroom floor at the end of *Les Gloutonnes*, Arno wears a dark negligée with a white design on each shoulder; she wears this same negligée in *The Hot Nights of Linda*, shot in late 1973 and finished early 1974, which suggests that her scenes for *Les Gloutonnes* may have been collected then. Note too the narrative similarity; in both *The Hot Nights of Linda* (made for Eurociné) and *Les Gloutonnes* (made for CFFP), Arno reads a book in bed which inspires her to imagine the rest of the film!





*Of the five images on this page, only the top left can be seen in Les Gloutonnies. Although the bottom left shot of Maciste (Wal Davis) is probably a publicity pose, the scenes involving Purpure (Chantal Broquet) being tortured and apparently killed by Bianca (Lina Romay), and the scene of Montserrat Prous exhorting the heavens (with an unknown actor in the background) are lost fragments of Les Exploits érotiques de Maciste dans l'Atlantide - a story which, like the Satyricon of Petronius, now exists only in fragments....*



## AL OTRO LADO DEL ESPEJO

Spain & France 1973

Spanish Deposito legal: M30.303-73

French visa number: 41656

*Original theatrical title in country of origin*

**Al otro lado del espejo** (SP) *On the Other Side of the Mirror*

**Le Miroir obscène** (FR theatrical re-edit) *The Obscene Mirror*

*Alternative titles*

**Lo specchio del piacere** (IT theatrical) *The Mirror of Pleasure*

**Virginité interdite** (FR alt. theatrical poster) *Virginity Forbidden*

**Lo specchio del desiderio** (IT video cover) *The Mirror of Desire*

*Unconfirmed titles*

**Through the Looking Glass** (English-lang' export title [MF])

**Inceste** (pre-release title [OB/MF])

**Outre-tombe** (pre-release title [OB/MF]) *Beyond the Grave*

**Le Miroir cochon** (alt. French theatrical [OB]) *The Dirty Mirror*

**Le Miroir obscène des femmes obscènes** (alt. French theatrical [OB]) *Obscene Mirror, Lewd Women*

*Production companies*

**Orfeo Producciones Cinematográficas, S.A.** (Madrid)

**Comptoir Français du Film Production** (Paris)

*Theatrical distributors*

**C.B. Films** (Madrid)

**Comptoir Français du Film Production** (Paris)

*Timeline*

Shooting	August	1973
Writers Circle Award	20 January	1974
French visa issued ( <i>Le Miroir obscène</i> )	13 January	1975
France*	30 April	1975
Barcelona	18 May	1976
Madrid	21 February	1977
Seville	18 May	1978
Italy (Rome) ( <i>Lo specchio del piacere</i> )	15 January	1981

\* some sources say 03 September 1975

*Theatrical running time*

Spain	82m
France	97m

*Cast of Al otro lado del espejo:* **Emma Cohen** (Ana Olivera). **Robert Woods** (Bill, trumpet player). **Françoise Brion** (Tina). **Philippe Lemaire** (Pipo). **Alice Arno** (Carla, Ana's cousin). **Ramiro Oliveras** (Miguel Ferreya, a theatre director). **Wal**

**Davis** [Waldemar Wohlfahrt] (Arturo Barbour, Ana's husband-to-be). **Howard Vernon** (Professor Olivera, Ana's father). **María Bassó** (Elvira, Ana's aunt). **Adela Tauler** (Stefania, Bill's wife). **Roger Sarbib** (Roger, club pianist). *uncredited:* **Jess Franco** (jazz pianist). **Nicole Guettard** (Franca, Miguel's assistant).

*Cast of Le Miroir obscène:* **Emma Cohen** (Annette Whitman). **Robert Woods** (Bill, trumpet player). **Howard Vernon** (Professor Whitman, father of Marie and Annette). **Philippe Lemaire** (Pipo). **Alice Arno** (Clara, Annette's cousin). **Lina Romay** (Marie Madeleine Whitman, Annette's sister). *uncredited:* **Wal Davis** [Waldemar Wohlfahrt] (Artur, Norwegian archaeology student). **María Bassó** (Elvira, Annette's aunt). **Adela Tauler** (Stefania, Bill's wife). **Alice Arno** (Marie's blonde lover in the mirror). **Pamela Stanford** (Marie's 2nd blonde lover in the mirror). **Ramiro Oliveras** (Michel Rocca, theatre director). **Nicole Guettard** (Miguel's assistant). **Ramón Ardid** (Marie's male lover in the mirror). **Françoise Brion** (Tina). **Roger Sarbib** (Roger, club pianist).

*Credits:* directed by **Jess Franco**. screenplay & adaptation by **Jess Franco**. screenplay collaborator: **Françoise Brion** [FR prints]. directors of photography: **Antonio Millán** [SP prints] / **Gérard Brissaud** [FR prints]. supervising editors: **Mercedes Alonso**, **Gérard Kikoïne**. set dresser: **Luis Vasquez**. music by **Adolfo Waitzman** [SP prints] / music by **André Benichou** [FR prints]. music production: **André Benichou**, **Jacques Nicolet** [FR prints]. producers: **José María Forque**, **Francisco Gómez Reyes**. production managers: **José Manuel Miguel Herrero**, **Robert de Nesle**. assistant production: **Mario Morales**. production secretary: **Fernande Meunier** [FR prints]. assistant director: **Any** [**Ana María Settimó de**] **Esteva**. continuity: **Marí Sol** [**Marisol**] **García Morcillo** [SP prints] / **Simone Leguillon** [FR prints]. camera operator: **Alberto Prous**. camera assistant: **Juan A. Prous**. stills: **Howard Vernon** [as 'Mario Lippert']. songs: **Roger Sarbib**, **Bruno Coquatrix**. set construction: **Fonseca da Silva**. make-up: **Adela del Pino**. assistant make-up: **Monique Adelaide**. assistant editors: **María Dolores Laguna**, **María Luisa Hernández**. colour: **Eastmancolor**. film stock: **Kodak Eastmancolor** [FR prints]. laboratories: **L.T.C.** (Saint-Cloud), **Madrid Film**. titles: **S. Film - Pablo Nuñez**. sound re-recording: **Estudios Exa**. sound recordist: **Jacques Pessis**. wardrobe: **Cornejo** (Madrid), **Anahory** (Lisbon). "Our thanks to the Office of Tourism of Funchal (Madeira) for their collaboration during the shooting of this film."

**Synopsis:** *Ana lives in a beautiful mansion on the island of Madeira with her father and an elderly Aunt. She is about to marry her fiancé Arturo. Ana seeks the blessing of her reluctant father, but before the marriage can take place, he hangs himself. Desolate and wracked with guilt, Ana calls off the marriage and leaves the family home in Madeira*



to try and forget. In Lisbon she works as a pianist in a jazz bar and falls in love with Bill, a jazz trumpeter. One night, while performing on stage, she sees her dead father appear in a mirror. Entering the mirror in her thoughts, she traverses a dark space and sees a vision of herself murdering Bill. With a scream, she finds herself back on the stage, at the piano, and continues with her set. Some time later, Ana meets up for a meal with Miguel, a theatre director who sees Ana's potential as an actress and wants to cast her as the lead in his current production of *Medea*. Ana auditions, impressing Miguel and his financial backer. Returning to the jazz bar, Ana is horrified to learn that Bill has been found dead, stabbed in a nearby park. What is Ana's role in this? Does the same fate await Miguel? Or Pipo, a rich older man who wants to seduce her?

**Production notes:** *Al otro lado del espejo*, one of Franco's strongest films of the 1970s, very nearly didn't happen. Based on an idea he had first tried to launch in the early 1960s, it was announced to the Spanish press in June 1973 as 'Ultratumba', starring Emma Cohen and Ramiro Oliveros, with a supporting cast including Daniel Gélin, Mónica Randall and William Berger.<sup>1</sup> However when Gélin suffered a serious heart attack prior to filming, the project came perilously close to cancellation. At this point Randall and Berger dropped out; luckily Franco and producer José María Forqué managed to juggle commitments and arrange new casting (Gélin had almost certainly been cast as Pipo, a role taken by another well-established French actor, Philippe Lemaire). Vitally, Franco was able to keep his leading lady on board: in an interview dated 1 July 1973, Emma Cohen told a reporter, "What I [will] do is go to the islands of Madeira to shoot a movie. I'll spend the summer working."<sup>2</sup> Given the unexpected setback, it seems likely that the cheap and cheerful Maciste films were slotted in quickly to keep Franco and his repertory cast (Woodes, Arno, Davis and Vernon) busy whilst a new cast and schedule were sorted out. *Al otro lado del espejo* finally began shooting on Madeira early August, and in stark contrast to the tomfoolery of the Maciste films it emerged as an elegant and sombre piece of work, helped of course by the fact that whereas the Maciste films were bankrolled entirely by Comptoir, production money for *Al otro lado del espejo* came chiefly from Forqué's financially robust Producciones Cinematográficas Orfeo. Forqué, himself a decent director perhaps best known outside Spain for his gloriously over-ripe giallo *In the Eye of the Hurricane*, got on well with Franco, and the deal with Comptoir seems to have been amicable too because de Nesle is also credited as the co-producer of Forqué's *Tarot* (1973) starring Sue Lyon. Sadly, plans for a second Franco film with Forqué, 'The Empty Man', to be shot in Porto Rico starring Robert Woods, came to nought.<sup>3</sup>

**Review:** *Al otro lado del espejo* is a well-made, carefully elaborated tale about a young woman's inability to escape gnawing guilt after the suicide of her father. Although Franco directed it immediately after his irreverent Maciste films, he shifts gears profoundly for this sorrowful exploration of familial and sexual dysfunction. Unfolding

with tragic inevitability, the story boasts a stand-out performance from Emma Cohen, harrowingly expressive as a fragile child-woman locked in a circuit of self-thwarting unhappiness, whose visions of her dead father go hand in hand with the deaths of three men to whom she feels close.

In its original Spanish version this is a strange and ambiguous film, rather like Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* in that it's poised between ghost story and psychological case study. For much of the time Ana's visions of her dead father (seen in mirrors throughout the film) could be simply delusions. A supernatural interpretation is only consolidated in the last five minutes, when Aunt Elvira sees the dead man, and breaks the mirror to release Ana from his malefic influence. You could, I suppose, argue that Elvira is hallucinating too, after receiving a disturbing phone call from Ana, but it would be a bit of a stretch; we've had no prior reason to think she's unstable. It's a shame in a way that the story opts for a ghostly explanation, because it works so well as a portrait of the way guilt distorts human behaviour.

The visions occur when Ana gets close to other men, and they act as a prelude to murder. The first comes when she's playing piano at a jazz bar. In a large mirror across the room she sees her father hanging by the neck. As if drifting in a solipsistic haze she traverses the mirror's edge, passing through a strange, darkened interior, and finding herself in daylight in a public park. Her current lover Bill is there too, and as if in a dream she stabs him. Then, with a scream, she finds she's still onstage, playing the piano. The situation recalls something Chet Baker once told Franco, about the way a musician can journey out of the room and into his own private world while improvising (for more on this idea, see *Venus in Furs*). Later we learn that Bill was indeed stabbed in a nearby park. But what part did Ana play? Physically she was nowhere near him. Was it perhaps a memory of something she did earlier that day? This unsutured moment, in which a violent traumatic event passes without explanation, serves to destabilise the film's portrait of reality. Franco leaves the mystery unexplained, a decision which amplifies the illogical, dreamlike nature of the story.

As so often in Franco's work, a key theme here is incest. No doubt because the film was a Spanish co-production, the development of the idea is very subtle; we barely see father and daughter touch, much less get into bed with each other. Neither do we hear Ana or her father make overt statements of incestuous devotion or desire. On the surface, molestation does not take place. What causes the family catastrophe is Ana's decision to marry, yet even this is handled cautiously; the arguments and jealous rages one might expect from the father are limited to a single tense exchange. When he hears that Anna wishes to marry, he demands that it be done quickly, as if washing his hands of the situation. His subsequent suicide comes out of the blue. The absence of a melodramatic confrontation, or dialogue underlining the attraction between father and daughter, throws emphasis onto the symbolic. The suicide follows the daughter's decision to wed, the latter being



a symbolic cutting of the ties of patriarchal control. The father's ghost appears in mirrors, but only as a hanged man: the image of his negation. All the terrible things Ana then does spring from her guilt at having reduced her father to this emasculated state of redundancy. A reflection without presence; an effect without a cause. No threatening spirit, he simply hangs there, a lingering reproach, a reminder that, by deciding to marry, Ana turned her back on the unspoken romance between father and daughter.

Ana responds to the suicide by cancelling her marriage, and from here on, when other men get close, her attitude shifts from friendliness and vulnerability to nervous stiffness. Given the prevalent gender signifiers of the early 1970s (Cohen dresses boyishly in denim jackets, and in a key scene black tie and tails), it's not much of a stretch to suppose that her 'problem' with men is that she doesn't really desire them. Instead, the men with whom she sleeps are father-surrogates; she can kill them without the guilt that would follow from a direct attack on the patriarch. Why does she need to do it? Where does this rage come from? The only plausible explanation is abuse. The theme of incestuous abuse is poetically visualised when Ana has sex with Pipo, an older man who's taken an interest in her. The two of them lie in bed together, beside a window with a view of a lush Lisbon townscape. Above them, further up the hillside, is Ana's family home, overlooking everything from its lofty vantage point. Franco photographs the scene so that the reflection of the house in the bedroom window is superimposed over Anna's lovemaking, symbolising the supernatural and psychological immanence of her past.

The final scenes, in which Ana returns to the family home, are hauntingly sad. As she climbs the staircase to the front door, she stumbles, her movements clumsy and slow, as though she's trapped in a nightmare and may never complete her journey. In psychological terms, her drastic slowing down is a sign of repression, the psyche trying to avoid confronting the truth of incestuous desire. By looking in the haunted mirror, Ana may come to face her feelings for her father, but when Elvira breaks the mirror (seeing the truth and erasing it – like the mother in an abusive household?) she robs Ana of that cathartic confrontation. When the mirror is broken Ana collapses on the staircase, and Franco cuts to a shot of her as a child, walking through a garden hand in hand with her father. Nothing in the body language is sinister, and yet surely what's implied is that the bond of love between father and daughter was corrupted at a young age? It would explain the father's bitter sense of ownership, Ana's murderous rage, and her inability to accept male love. On the other hand, you could say that the childhood image represents union after death, father and daughter together in a prelapsarian paradise. The final shot sees Ana sprawled lifeless on the steps, bedecked in the wedding dress she only ever wore on the day it was delivered: the day her father killed himself. Franco does not provide conclusive answers, preferring to end in an open, poetic register that ensures this marvellous film lingers hauntingly in the mirror of your thoughts...

**Franco on screen:** Jess can be spotted briefly, tickling the ivories at the jazz bar where Ana works.

**Music:** It's a case of swings and roundabouts when comparing the scores for *Al otro lado del espejo* and its French or Italian variants. *Al otro lado* begins with a light, almost childish theme played haltingly on piano, as if by a student practising, and several later scenes emphasise Ana's talents as a pianist by having her play complicated scales and arpeggios in the background. The main theme is a mournful piece for phased organ, the cadences of which strongly resemble the song *Windmills of Your Mind* (from *The Thomas Crown Affair*). It drapes the film in melancholy, strongly emphasising the tragic aspect of the story. The French and Italian versions of the film (see 'Other versions') feature excellent though quite different music by André Benichou, with whom Franco became greatly enamoured in 1974 (see *Lorna... the Exorcist*, *Les Grandes Emmerdeuses* and *Exorcism*). Benichou's contributions replace the coolness of the original score with haunting jazz-rock featuring his characteristically smooth lead guitar (some of the cues here were also used in *Les Gloutonnes*) ... Look out for the scene where Philippe Lemaire and Françoise Brion take Emma Cohen to an afternoon piano bar, which features Roger Sarbib contributing his real-life skills as a jazz pianist; Sarbib was a well-respected French musician who played for such icons of French chanson as Edith Piaf, Charles Trenet and Maurice Chevalier. His name also pops up on the credits for the two Franco *Maciste* films, although he's nowhere to be found in them...

**Locations:** Funchal (Madeira), and Lisbon.

**Studio:** Tobis (Lisbon).

**Connections:** The lead character is a jazz musician troubled by a spectre from beyond the grave, echoing James Darren in *Venus in Furs*. The image of a father hanging by his neck is repeated from *Virgin among the Living Dead*. Ana is reading Heinrich Böll's *Das Brot der frühen Jahre* ('The Bread of Those Early Years'), a book about the struggle of the individual in wartime, and the need for love. The drinking game the characters play, called 'The King Edward Game', also pops up in *Eugenie* (1970).

**Other versions:** As so often, it wasn't long before co-producer Robert de Nesle asked Franco for a sexier version of the film. He agreed to the request and created *Le Miroir obscène*, an ingenious if only partially successful reworking of the original material. Instead of Ana (renamed Annette) being traumatised by her father's suicide, Franco introduces a sister, Marie, played in newly filmed inserts by Lina Romay. 'Annette' and Marie have enjoyed an incestuous relationship since childhood; when Annette announces her forthcoming wedding, Marie is consumed by jealousy and commits suicide. (Notice the way Franco immediately makes incest the clear and definite focus of the story when free to do so.) Through careful editing and re-dubbing, Franco keeps Annette's father alive long enough to set up the twist, after which all the visions of him in *Al otro lado del espejo* are replaced by visions of Marie, entwined with various lovers, demanding that her sister join





her in death. Despite a few slip-ups here and there, including a less than satisfactory finale, the result is actually pretty good in its own right. The French version generally speeds up the pace of exposition, eliminating some scenes and clipping many others, while padding the film with sexual interludes. Franco's cunning redeployment of shots, his shooting of additional sex scenes and careful redubbing of dialogue, result in a second viable narrative from the same basic elements. However, there's no doubt that the film has greater emotional integrity in its original form; the father-daughter story is far more convincing than the lesbian story. Partly this is because we never see Cohen and Romay together; Cohen did *not* come back for the French reshoots, which seriously undercuts her supposedly intimate relationship. The lesbian theme in *Le Miroir obscène* is not even fully sustained: if we're to believe in Marie's jealousy you'd think Franco would at least make her a full-on separatist! Instead, two of the scenes in the 'obscene mirror' feature Romay having sex with Ramón Ardid (her real-life husband at the time), which does rather sabotage the ending in which Marie begs her sister to commit suicide in the name of Sapphism...

Interestingly, *Le Miroir obscène* includes material shot for the Spanish version but snipped by the censor. For instance, the murder of Miguel/Michel is longer, with a few more seconds of his reaction plus an extra shot of him falling. Franco obviously experienced serious difficulties getting his work past the Spanish censor board: the stabbing we can see in the French version is by no means extreme, yet it was cut down to just a single shot in the Spanish edition. *Le Miroir obscène* also includes several sequences of Emma Cohen undressed; for instance we see her answer the phone in the nude. In the Spanish version she's photographed from the waist up wearing a bra. Likewise, the scene in which Annette makes love with Pipo incorporates topless shots of Cohen in the French version, and coyly framed clothed shots in the Spanish version. In each of these cases the more 'explicit' material dates from the original shoot: Cohen did not return for additional filming.

To make matters more complicated, *Le Miroir obscène* subsequently formed the basis of a third variant, *Lo specchio del piacere*, aimed at the Italian porn market. While it's similar to *Le Miroir obscène*, it nevertheless trims a couple of vital scenes and leaves a major loose end hanging, namely the fate of Annette's father, who disappears from the film after the first fifteen minutes. Whereas *Le Miroir obscène* included a scene in which Annette phones home and learns that her father has hung himself, thus making use of a primary image from *Al otro lado del espejo* and removing the last pillar of stability for the doomed heroine, *Lo specchio del piacere* dispenses with this detail and leaves the father mysteriously absent. It also drops the funeral service, skims past Annette leaving Madeira, and trims two minutes from the scene in which she reads for Michel's play, including the subsequent murmurs of "Tres bien!" from Michel's financial backer. It does, however, reinstate much of the romance with Pipo from *Al otro lado del espejo* (though not the material newly discovered - see below). *Lo specchio del piacere* also

retains the entire scene in which Annette breaks off her wedding to Arthur - unlike *Le Miroir obscène* where she dumps him with a few terse phrases. Most importantly, *Lo specchio del piacere* adds new material missing from both the French and Spanish cuts. Annette's attempted suicide is much more graphic: she's naked, and she slashes her wrists in clear view of the camera. She then climbs into the bath and we get a lingering shot of her bloody wrists bleeding into the bathwater (incidentally, another echo of *Venus in Furs*). This disturbing image appears in neither the Spanish nor French versions. Less vitally, *Lo specchio del piacere* adds several hardcore penetration shots during the lovemaking scene between Annette and Pipo, and again during the final 'obscene mirror' scene. There is also additional footage of Lina Romay and Alice Arno fooling around on the bed: this evidently dates from the Franco re-shoot. However, close-up footage of a brunette performing cunnilingus on an unidentified vagina is then cut into Franco's re-shoot material (in other words, an insert within an insert!). These shots do not appear in *Le Miroir obscène* and were probably not filmed by Franco. Similarly, Lina Romay's 'sex in the mirror' with Ramón Ardid is inter-cut with new hardcore footage of penetration which is not present in the French version. Remember, Franco's 1974 re-shoot wasn't hardcore as such: it featured shots of vaginal stimulation, a flaccid penis (Ramón Ardid's), and Ardid with his face pressed against Romay's vagina, but no close-ups of full cunnilingus or penetration. There are numerous other small differences between the French and Italian versions, and fans of the delectable Alice Arno would never forgive me if I neglected to mention that *Lo specchio del piacere* includes an extra scene in which she lounges topless with Cohen (who sports a garish leopard-skin bikini). Another change, small but regrettable, comes when Annette murders Pipo. In *Al otro lado del espejo* Franco cuts from the bedroom killing to the poolside party, where Pipo's lover Carla nurses a drink. When Pipo dies, Carla turns around suddenly, as if somehow aware of his passing. Both *Le Miroir obscène* and *Lo specchio del piacere* interfere with the editing of this sequence, losing the suggestion of a psychic link.

In 2013 I was fortunate enough to see the pre-release screener of a new edit of the film, running 109 mins, an astonishing thirty minutes longer than the Spanish VHS. The rediscovered footage falls into two main categories; extended jazz improvisations at the club where Anna works, and a generous extension of Anna's day out with Pipo, Tina and Carla. Cohen's first performance of 'Madeira' at the bar lasts two and a half minutes in the VHS version and nearly eight minutes in the new version. The second sequence in the bar, from Cohen walking out on Woods after he kisses her, to the piano piece when she sees her father in the mirror, lasts two minutes longer in the new version. There's an extra twenty seconds of nudity from Emma Cohen during the phone call from Bill; nearly one and a half minutes more material 'onstage' at the start of the theatre scene, including more of Miguel directing the actors onstage and his seated conversation with Anna in the stalls.

The third jazz club scene gains another minute or so. There is forty seconds more of Cohen wandering by the seafront, thirty seconds more of Cohen, Lemare, Arno and Brion on the yacht and driving round Funchal in the open topped car, and most strikingly, an extra *six minutes* with Brion, Cohen and Lemaire spending the afternoon together, watching a singer in a bar, going for a walk, and chatting. Finally, the bedroom scene between Cohen and Lemaire is nearly two and a half minutes longer, including extra topless shots during the sex. (On the other hand the stabbing of Miguel is missing the extra shot seen in the Italian cut, and *Lo specchio del piacere's* extended suicide scene is also missing).

So what does this extra footage do for the film? For a start, the emphasis is shifted in favour of the soundtrack: this is another of Franco's love letters to jazz, a kissing cousin to *Vénus in Furs*, with the music given pride of place. The second effect is even more striking; with its greatly extended 'day out' for Anna, Pipo, Tina and Carla, the film takes on a vivid existential quality. This longer version is a dedicated evocation of the fragile pleasure of living; to enjoy lunch and drinks on holiday, to stroll with friends around a beautiful old town, to soak up the sun and sea and fresh air ... and yet, beneath the dappled sunlight and the laughter and the gentle delirium of afternoon drinking, always the melancholy, a minor key in the soul that will not go away. As the plot recedes from view, Franco evokes perfectly that elusive yet ineffable sense of being in the here and now but haunted by absence and suspension: the enjoyment of rootlessness, as we drift through time on the raft of a casual afternoon; the chatter, the conviviality, the clink of glasses, the wandering in and out of this bar and that, the tinkle of jazz piano, more drinks, spontaneous conversations with strangers, a thread picked up and then left behind in an instant, the discrete mutter of fellow drinkers at nearby tables, the sense of everything and nothing, life and emptiness, fullness and the void, as the sun slowly slips from the sky. Some may find this longer version boring, or frustrating, and it's true that nothing 'happens' during the extended afternoon sequence. For me, though, it's an example of one of Franco's greatest yet least celebrated skills; he transports you to a real day, a real time and place, amid the passing texture of existence, as though you've astral-travelled through the window of his camera. He doesn't do this with any art-movie signposting, there's no song and dance made about it; I somehow doubt he even knew that he was doing it. Self-consciousness would steam up the window, clog the passage between here and then; his folding of space-time occurs almost as a side product, arising from his passion for the moment; *his* moment, the moment of filming. Lingering, as he does so often, on images that fascinate him, regardless of an audience, irrespective of producers or the dictates of a plot, his fascination opens the door for us. A part of me has *lived* a few precious moments of this film; I feel that I've been there, on the island of Madeira one Thursday afternoon in August 1973, drawn into a faraway day, a ghost from the future, through the spell of Franco's ever-turning camera.

**Problematica:** The following actors listed in *Obsession* do not appear: Monica Swinn, Carmen Carbonnel, Simon Andreu, Chantale Bouquet. *Obsession* also adds the following unconfirmed credit: co-screenplay by Nicole Guettard. The Spanish end cast list mis-credits Françoise Brion as 'Carla' and Alice Arno as 'Tina'.

**Press coverage:** *Al otro lado del espejo* received plaudits way beyond anything to which Franco was accustomed in Spain. Emma Cohen received a prestigious 'Best Actress' award from Spain's Círculo de Escritores Cinematográficos (The Film Critics Circle), and one Spanish reviewer hailed, "A fascinating film in which beauty and emotion are played in a true display of skill. The plot is an hallucinatory fantasy in the style of an American thriller, in which terror and suspense alternate. The action takes place beyond the ordinary things of life. It falls squarely in the ultra-fantastic and is an exploration of those areas beyond, that the human mind can not understand ... This unsettling story of hallucinations and dramatic enigmas is told to us by Jesús Franco through a genuine abundance of beautifully crafted shots, at the same time startling and amazing." As well as praising Cohen's performance, he singled out others in the cast, including "the dynamic and brilliant Françoise Brion, the great French actress (born, however, in Venezuela), the effective and balanced Philippe Lemaire, and the vigorous and expressive Ramiro Oliveros, one of the top leading men of Spanish cinema at the moment."<sup>24</sup> Such was the enthusiasm that it seemed the door was being held open for a more conventional career in Spanish mainstream cinema. Franco, however, scarcely noticed...

## FEMALE VAMPIRE

### France & Belgium 1973

French visa number: 43320

*Original theatrical titles in countries of origin*

**La Comtesse noire** (FR) *The Black Countess*

**Femmes vampires** (BEL theatrical 'soft version')

**Vampier Vrouwen** (BEL Dutch-lang theatrical 'soft version')

*Alternative titles*

**Les Avaleuses** (FR hardcore theatrical/FR video) *The Swallowers*

**La Comtesse aux seins nus** (FR alt. theatrical/FR video)

*The Topless Countess*

**Entfesselte Begierde** (GER theatrical/video) *Unleashed Desire*

**Lüsterne Vampire im Spermarausch** (GER hardcore theatrical/video) *Lustful Vampires in Semen Rush*

**Un caldo corpo di femmina** (IT theatrical) *Hot Body of a Woman*

**The Bare Breasted Countess** (UK theatrical 'X' version)

**The Bare Breast Countess** (Eurociné press invitation)

**Erotikill** (US video)



**The Loves of Irina** (US video)  
**Erotikiller** (IT video – extra bloodsucking scenes)  
**Erotikill Lady Dracula 2** (GER video)  
**Erotikill Lüsterne Vampire im Spermarausch** (GER video)  
**Verentahrima Morsian** (FIN video) *Blood-stained Bride*  
**Mujeres vampiras** (SP video) *Female Vampires*  
**El ataque de las vampiras** (SP DVD) *Attack of the Vampires*  
**Un caldo corpo di donna** (IT DVD)  
**A Maldição da Vampira** (POR DVD)

#### Unconfirmed titles

**Insatiable Lust** (French X-rated version)  
**Jacula** (BEL theatrical release [Eurociné book])  
**The Last Thrill** [doubtful – see *Tender and Perverse Emanuelle*]  
**Yacula** (shooting title [MF])

#### Production companies

**Eurociné** (Paris)  
**Général Films** (Brussels) [check - ???]

#### Theatrical distributors

**Eurociné** (Paris)  
**Cosmopolis Films** (Brussels)

#### Timeline

Initial shooting (Madeira)	Autumn	1973
Further shooting (Paris)	December	1973
Further shooting (Brussels)	circa Feb/March	1974
Belgium (Brussels)	24 January	1975
French visa issued*	(month unknown)	1975
France*	07 May	1975
UK 'X' certificate granted	11 December	1975
UK cinema release	January	1976
Italy (Turin)	11 May	1978

#### Theatrical running time

France*	88m
UK	58m54s

\* this information probably relates to *Les Avaleuses*.

**Cast:** **Lina Romay** (Irina, Countess of Karlstein). **Jack Taylor** (Baron von Rathony, a poet). **Alice Arno** (Maria, princess's maid). **Monica Swinn** (Princess de Rochefort). **Jess Franco** (Dr. Roberts). *uncredited:* **Roger Germanes** (Irina's first victim). **Luis Barboo** (Irina's mute servant). **Anne Watican**. **Bigotini** (vice cop). **Pierre Quéрут** ('inspector' speaking with Dr. Roberts). **Ramón Ardid** (hotel masseur). **Jean-Pierre Bouyxou** (Dr. Orloff). **Gilda Arancio** (Irina's blonde victim chained to wall).

**Credits:** director: **Jess Franco**. dialogue: **Josianne Pierette Belair** [as 'P. Belair']. director of photography: **Jess Franco** [as

'Joan Vincent']. editing by **Pierre Quéрут**. music by **Daniel White**. laboratory: **Technicolor S.p.A.** [ENG prints]. sound recording studio: **Doppaggio Internazionale** (Rome). *uncredited:* producers: **Daniel Lesoeur**, **Jean Quéрут**. screenplay: **H.L. Rostaine**, **Joseph Jehoulet**. actual editor: **Jess Franco**. assistant director: **Richard Deconinck** [aka 'Bigotini']. still photography: **Ramón Ardid**. make-up: **Elisenda Villanueva**. assistant editor: **Ramón Ardid**. [Note: Different prints vary as to director credits: FR prints say 'J.P. Johnson', Belgian prints say 'Joseph Gehoulet'.]

**Synopsis:** *Funchal, Madeira; 22nd February 1974. Irina, the Countess of Karlstein, is a vampire whose craving for the vital energy of living beings means she can never enjoy sexual relations without causing the death of her partners. Having arrived in Madeira with her male secretary, and taken up residence at a hilltop house once owned by her family, she immediately sets about finding victims. In the hills outside Funchal she meets a man at a bird sanctuary and performs fellatio on him; he dies from her ministrations. Baron von Rathony, a visiting poet drawn to Madeira by strange stories about the region, hears the victim's scream echo across the hills. Anna, a journalist, requests an audience with the Countess and quizzes her about her ancestors, who once lived on the island. She also asks about the murder which occurred the previous night. The Countess responds only with hand gestures and nods of the head; she is mute, as is her secretary. The local police inspector, and the coroner Dr. Roberts, discuss the recent killing. Roberts asserts that the victim was bitten by a vampire during orgasm, and sucked dry of both blood and semen. The inspector thinks Roberts is crazy. Irina's next victim is the masseur of a nearby hotel. She drains him of sexual energy and her secretary disposes of the body. Roberts visits Dr. Orloff, a scholar and mystic, to tell him about the recent vampire killing. The two men discuss the strange forces that reside on the island. The next night, Irina visits and seduces Anna, the journalist, killing her by draining her sexual energy. Growing ever more weary of the death she leaves in her wake, Irina attempts to satisfy her needs alone through masturbation, but finds the experience unbearably frustrating. Baron von Rathony sees the Countess in the lobby of his hotel; the two have drinks on the verandah and feel a strong attraction to each other. The Baron realises that Irina is a creature from another realm and begs her to take him there. Later that day, Irina visits Princess de Rochefort and her lesbian lover and engages in a sadomasochistic threesome which leaves the two women dead. Irina and Baron von Rathony meet again and she takes him to her house in the upper hills. Although she feels a deep emotional attraction to this man, Irina cannot help but destroy him too. Later she visits Dr. Orloff to inform him that she intends to withdraw and leave mankind alone. Dr. Roberts, who plans to kill Irina, forces entrance to her home and kills her secretary. However, Irina has already chosen to end her own life by bathing in a mixture of blood and water...*

**Production notes:** The fourth film begun during the Madeira trip, *La Comtesse noire* aka *Female Vampire*, would eventually become Franco's best known of the period, and one of the most

beguiling of his whole career. However, it was not completed on Madeira; instead it would be sewn together in the coming months, incorporating scenes shot in Paris in February 1974 (involving Monica Swinn, Alice Arno and Gilda Arancio) and exteriors filmed in the countryside near Paris (with Romay and Roger Germanes). Yet more scenes were filmed on a studio soundstage in Brussels (comprising the police procedural material with Franco and Pierre Quérut, and the Orloff scenes with Jean-Pierre Bouyxou).<sup>1</sup> Note that in the English-language dub, Baron von Rathony writes in his diary that the date is the 22 February 1974; did the voice artist perhaps use the actual dubbing date for his dialogue? *Female Vampire* embarked on an even more complicated journey after completion, going through numerous re-edits and retitlings to shape it for different markets, at a time when the goalposts of what could legally be shown were moving constantly...

*"This murder is surrounded by a mystery not easy to elucidate"* - Dr. Roberts (Jess Franco)

**Review:** Opening with probably the most iconic image in Jess Franco's oeuvre (Lina Romay, walking through a mist-shrouded forest, nude except for a cape, black boots and leather belt), this is a crucial but divisive entry in the director's filmography. Admirers feel that it embodies all that is wonderful about his cinema; others see nothing more than a lethargic softcore snooze. *Female Vampire* may not be the best place to begin if you're planning a journey through the Franco labyrinth, but it's a film you simply have to see if you're remotely curious.

Franco's casual reputation as a purveyor of sexy horror thrills does nothing to prepare the first-time viewer for the strangeness that awaits here. While this is quite explicitly a film about a female 'sex vampire', it's delivered to the screen as a stylistic fugue in which loneliness, desire, submission and sadness predominate. Franco either ignores or erases the clear demarcations that would make this a conventional genre product; instead, his camera and his attitude (essentially one and the same) ensure that we enter this exotic dreamworld on his terms. Don't expect a horror movie, expect a Jess Franco movie; it's really as simple as that.

Before we go on, it's important to mention that *Female Vampire* exists in a bewildering multiplicity of versions, beginning at the very source. Franco actually shot a 'horror version' and an 'erotic version', with several key scenes being filmed twice: in the horror version Irina's vampiric attacks involve the sucking of blood, while in the erotic version the fluids are seminal and vaginal. Later, a hardcore version called *Les Avaleuses* ('The Swallowers') was created, incorporating ugly, poorly matched pornographic material not filmed by Franco. Further complicating matters over the years, the vagaries of what was permissible in different markets resulted in variants emphasising either the sexual content or the horror content. For the purposes of initial discussion I'll be talking about the uncut 'erotic' version of the film, which is basically softcore

with one instance of mild hardcore, namely a couple of passing shots of Lina Romay fellating her then husband, Ramón Ardid.

Central though the film is to a discussion of Franco's work, there's something strange and elusive about *Female Vampire*: just as you think you're 'getting' it, you find that it shifts and changes. I've watched it maybe fifteen times and yet it always feels different, as though scenes have taken on a different timbre whilst I've been away. Familiarity never seems to dull the experience; the clouds keep changing, the mood shifts, emotional colours intensify or recede. I think this is because the film, with its slumberous opiated texture, never delivers itself whole. Or rather, you never make it all the way through with your wits unscrambled. Sensuous and suffocating, it's soaked in a narcotic fug as pervasive as the mist that swirls through the Madeiran locations. The mind is encouraged to drift, awareness evanesces, details of character and story, time and place, cause and effect, swim around in your head like twinkling lights dissolving through a defocussed lens into pastel blurs. No wonder one spots things after eight viewings that seem suddenly blindingly obvious; it's like trying to follow a narrative under hypnosis.

I love this film and I've allowed it to mesmerise me many times, but even I must admit it presents challenges for the viewer. It's very slow, it's about ten minutes too long, and, if you haven't yet embraced Franco's use of the zoom lens the device will gnaw at your sensibilities throughout. Numerous shots swim out of focus, and although this is often deliberate it can be hard for casual viewers to spot the difference between a genuine stylistic fingerprint and a moment of ineptitude or laziness. Vampiric lore is abandoned: Irina goes sunbathing, her elective affinity is not with bats but with birds, and there's nary a fang nor a stake in sight. The same goes for garlic, crucifixes, castles and cobwebs, so anyone watching with traditional expectations will find the experience frustrating. Even the 'sexy stuff' is bespoke, tailored to Franco's idiosyncratic viewpoint. Nudity is frequent, but the eroticism never kindles into steamy passion; it's a dreamy version of arousal which Franco favours, moving to rhythms one might call feminine rather than the usual phallic drives of erotic cinema. Add to these factors the woeful English language dubbing, which makes male lead Jack Taylor sound like a bored mafia don reading cue cards with a blocked nose, and an episodic, discontinuous narrative line with little sense of cumulative energy, and you have a film that can alienate a sizeable proportion of viewers.

But all of these problems are answerable. The film is slow because the Countess Irina lives outside time; her existence is formless, eternal, without beginning or end (this also explains the narrative structure and the absence of cumulative energy). The running time varies according to which version one sees (*Erotikill*, the 'horror version', runs a tidy seventy minutes). The zoom lens is Franco's personal signature, turning the image into a series of pulsations which mimic the organic process of breathing and the stirrings of arousal. (It's also a time-saving device essential to his very low budget projects). The shots that slide out of focus

are often (though admittedly not always) part of the mesmeric, hypnotic aura Franco wishes to create, plus they reflect the way the Countess over-rides the will of others, suggesting the dissolution of willpower by irresistible seduction. Vampiric lore, as commonly understood, stems from *Dracula*, a Victorian novel about a patriarchal vampire; this is a modern story about a female vampire, the rules are as different as men are from women. Like its nearest relative, the relentlessly sun-drenched *Vampyros Lesbos*, it forsakes the chiaroscuro conventions of Gothic horror; note that Franco's 'male-centred' horror films (*Count Dracula*, *Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein* and *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein*) have many more scenes of darkness than his female vampire stories, a decision aligning women with the power of the sun and men with the shadows of night. As for the terrible English dubbing, this is easily sidestepped if one chooses the French language print with English subtitles.

Moving on, it's important to ask what it is that Irina does to her victims, a question that takes us to the heart of Franco's musings on sex and desire. For instance, by giving head to her first victim, she appears to practise a symbolic form of 'vampirism', syphoning off 'life essence' with a blow-job (although poor old Roger Germanes seems listless even before Irina goes down on him). The same thing happens (in the uncut version) to the hotel masseur played by Ramón Ardid. In both cases we're left wondering what's really happened; does Irina kill her lovers with an excess of pleasure, perhaps sustaining their orgasm until they die of a heart attack? Or is the process more metaphysical, with some ill-defined 'life force' ebbing away along with the semen? Is it blood that's being sucked? If so we don't see any. Local Madeiran mystic Dr. Orloff (where have we heard that name before?) tells the police, "*I have found, in the early books of Panthos, writings on the Countess of Karlstein and her murders. According to Panthos, she sucked the bodies of her victims and fed herself on their hormones.*" So why does this loss of 'hormones' kill them? The ambiguity is even more puzzling during Irina's lesbian clinch with Anna (an investigative journalist who asks too many personal questions while wearing an alluring swimsuit). Anna expires during a vigorous bout of cunnilingus, and we see Irina's head pop up from between the victim's thighs with a clear viscous fluid dripping from her mouth. However, given that there's no real connection between vaginal fluids and vitality (unlike the lore that surrounds seminal 'hormones'), there's no way that Anna can have been 'drained', in which case the fluids are irrelevant; the cause of death appears purely metaphysical.

There is an 'explanation' of sorts, delivered in a single line of dialogue by Franco himself, but it's highly problematic. He plays a mystically inclined coroner called Dr. Roberts, who describes the first victim's cause of death thus: "*He was bitten in the middle of an orgasm, and a vampire sucked his semen and his life away.*" This suggests that Irina drained the victim's blood along with his seminal fluid. Unfortunately it's far from evident when watching the scene in question, an unfortunate casualty of the decision to shoot a 'sexy'

version (*La Comtesse noire*) and a 'horror' version (*Erotikill*). In *La Comtesse noire* there's no indication of blood being sucked, not a drop or a smear on Irina's lips or anywhere on the victims; in *Erotikill* she literally goes for the jugular, chewing at the victims' throats with blood dripping from her mouth but leaving the sex organs untouched. The 'blood and semen' explanation is compromised by the bifurcated nature of the project; it relates not to what we see in either version, but an impossible synthesis of the two.

As explored in Stoker's *Dracula* and many other stories since, vampirism works on two levels; weakening of the body and corruption of the spirit. The first aspect has a clearly defined material basis: either blood is sucked out in sufficiently large quantities to cause weakening and lassitude (i.e. the victim is 'bled dry'), or some sort of debilitating infection results from the bite itself. At this level, vampirism is a physical process with rationally comprehensible dangers for the victim. Vampires may be supernatural beings but they attack the body and use corporeal methods to kill. What then follows, as the victims 'surrender' to the vampire's influence, takes us to the second level, a threat to the immortal soul. Why should being a victim result in damnation? Isn't that rather unfair? For explanation we must turn to the subtext because, as we all know, vampirism is often used as a metaphor for sexual forces that cannot be expressed directly (certainly this was the case with Stoker's novel, or the Universal and Hammer films). Thus, the aggressive intimacy of the bite, the weakening of the victim, the associations with savage appetite or carnality run rampant, serve as metaphors for 'dangerous' sexuality, coloured a dark and foreboding shade by a Catholic discourse which regards sex as animalistic and shameful. And of course the recipients, once bitten, are thus damned, having sinned through an act of erotic surrender, which is why 'the frightened victim who begins to enjoy it' is so essential to the mythos. All of this, taken together, forms a coherent structure of surface and subtext.

In *La Comtesse noire*, however, this coherence breaks down. Firstly, because the blood-drinking aspect has been erased/obscured/shuffled off into *Erotikill*, the physical process itself is puzzling; unlike the sucking of blood, there is no way to suck semen until a person is truly 'drained of life'. This absence of a plausible physical dimension throws us entirely into the arms of the symbolic, but it's a symbolism without a referent: vampirism cannot function here as a metaphor for sex, because Franco has already 'outed' the sexual undercurrent; it no longer *needs* a metaphor. What once was subtext is now surface. Nor is there a moral doctrine linking the appetites of the vampire with the 'bestial urges' in man; Franco, a committed atheist despite the lingering stains of a Catholic upbringing, does not portray sex as sinful and simply ignores the Catholic dimension to the vampire myth. The victims are not damned; their souls are never even mentioned. Only Irina is 'undead', everyone else just dies. As a consequence, in *La Comtesse noire* the mythic/metaphorical architecture and subtextual concerns of the vampire story collapse in a heap.





And yet the film works. It's unsettling and sad and erotic. The uncertainty and imprecision, the contradictions – these are essential qualities in Franco's best films. If we can't quite get a grip on what it is Irina does to her victims, the question nevertheless adds to the overall effect, turning *Female Vampire* into a dream about a horror film, more than a horror film outright. Nudity prevails while much else remains cloaked. Vagueness about the means of destruction makes the menace harder to delineate, and thus more oppressive and unnerving. It's as if the mere unveiling of Irina's sex has the power to sap her victims.

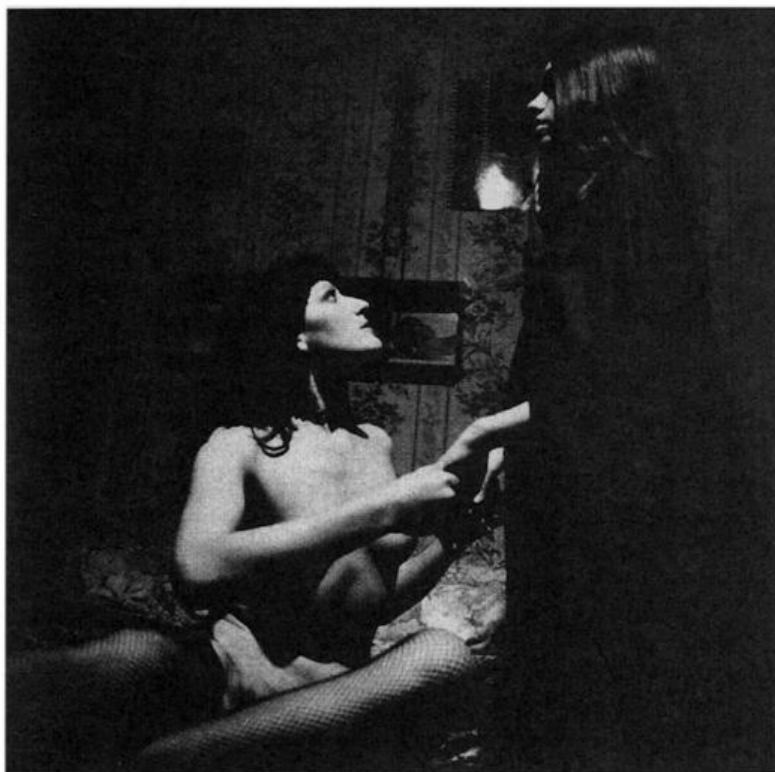
But if the prosaic mechanics of Irina's actions are hidden, and the conventional 'upstairs-downstairs' structure of text and subtext is redundant, what is left to propel *Female Vampire* – what's left when the details hived off to *Erotikill* and the structural dynamics of the Dracula mythos are put aside? The key word is seduction. Irina's death-dealing power is her implacable ability to seduce. Sex seals the deal, so to speak, but seduction stirs the passions first. The victim's need, thus aroused, becomes insatiable: Irina's seduction draws out the flame of desire until the body can no longer burn. It's the same force we encountered in *Venus in Furs*, in which Dennis Price's character is 'seduced to death' by a dead woman's reflection in a mirror, his body untouched, his clothes not even loosened. Seduction can occur without direct physical contact; one can be seduced by an image, by a voice, by an idea. At home after the interview, Anna finds herself involuntarily stroking her own breasts whilst the Countess's disembodied voice tells her that she has been 'marked', although physically the two have only shaken hands so far. Given that a hand-shake seems insufficient to secure domination of mind, body and spirit, we can assume that it takes attraction, whether acknowledged by the victim or not, for the Countess to gain psychic control. Irina's first victim, the man at the bird sanctuary, is seduced without a word being spoken; he sees her at a distance of fifty yards and is drawn first by the striking oddness of her appearance, and then by her compelling silence and beauty. Franco frames their sexual encounter through the wire mesh of two bird enclosures; although Irina and the man are actually in a walkway between the enclosures they are in effect visually 'trapped' by the superimposed wire. This entrapment without locks suggests the way that desire propels us into self-created prisons of the mind, while to an onlooker we're as free as anyone else. This is one of Franco's most consistent themes – seduction and desire, a vortex into which we plunge, unable to tell if we're letting ourselves go or being sucked in by forces beyond our control. Note that the framing of the bird sanctuary scene 'traps' both vampire and victim. Desire is the curse that unites them. The Countess herself is a victim of desire, a creature who pines for peace, for an end to killing, yet must leech away the life essence of others to survive. As she says in voice-over: "*Why has my body once again the desire of death? Why can't my senses survive without the last breath of a victim?*" We see her masturbating astride an unconscious victim, frantically grabbing and groping at her snatch in search of a

satisfaction deeper and more lasting than anyone can deliver, with or without a penis. Hers is truly a tragic situation. In one scene we see Irina orally fixate on a bedpost that's been getting in the way of Franco's lens like a camera-hungry extra throughout the film. Arousal escalates, and suddenly the bed's sausage-shaped bolster gets in on the action too. It's weird and funny and absurd, as if the world of objects is being pulled into the vacuum of Irina's hunger, but there's sadness too, which comes from seeing her unable to find peace for a moment, even after slaking her thirst with a victim.

*La Comtesse noire* has its share of accidental absurdities. The English translation is a frequent source of amusement, and the pulp-comic dialogue occasionally tips over into the ridiculous. It's in the nature of this fabulously bizarre film that Irina, who refuses to speak but instead communicates via hand gestures and nods of the head, should be 'interviewed' by a female investigative journalist in bra and panties who all but accuses her of murder, asking: "*Do you feel ill at ease being the descendant of a family of vampires?*" I also love the journalist's opening gambit: "*I'd like to inform you that the story I'm going to write from this interview will appear in all the major newspapers and magazines of Europe and America.*" Now that's coverage! Then there's Dr. Roberts, who informs the police that a male victim, "*was killed by a mouth.*" And yet the silly lines are fleeting, while the visual pleasures are sustained and unforgettable. Take the interview scene: we see the Countess looking out of a full-length picture window with her back to the camera, wearing a transparent white gown through which light silhouettes her body. It's a devastatingly chic image of supernatural allure that flies against the grain of vampire imagery by emphasising Irina's affinity with sunlight. Or check out the shot where the swimsuit-clad journalist first approaches Irina beside a hotel pool; we observe the meeting via an overhead shot which turns the geometry of the encounter into an abstract, Hockneyesque celebration of sunshine, modernity and affluence. *La Comtesse noire* is full of these memorable images, so the odd bit of nonsense here and there hardly detracts.

Someone who never puts a foot wrong is Lina Romay. This is her film, and Franco's camera soaks her up, plunging into her face and seeking out her sex, drawn to it again and again. Nineteen years old, with full, slightly insolent lips, calm-turning-to-cold dark eyes, shapely breasts and milky skin, she exudes teenage freshness, animal magnetism, and the allure of youthful arrogance. She knows she looks good, she knows the effect of her nakedness, and she loves turning the full glare of her charm on the camera. She rarely smiles; her eyes remain cold even as her body-heat radiates from the screen. While Franco's earlier muse, Soledad Miranda, possessed unique facial beauty, her erotic appeal was chillier: it's difficult to imagine her summoning the full bloom of carnal energy that Romay unleashes here.

The smaller roles are less vivid, although Jack Taylor deserves credit for his depressed, lonely poet, enchanted by the possibility of accompanying the Countess into other realms of existence. "*Will*



I was about to caption the above, a rarely seen picture of Irina (Lina Romay) and Princess de Rochefort (Monica Swinn) from *Female Vampire*, when I noticed something odd. In the film, de Rochefort is visited by Irina and bitten by her. But not in a room with that wallpaper! The room in which she's attacked is totally different, with bare stone walls (below, right). The room in this picture is nowhere to be found in *Female Vampire*! Could this shot relate to a scene missing from all versions currently available?

What's more, the wallpaper in the shot looked familiar. (Yes, I am now an authority on wallpaper in Jess Franco's cinema.) I checked the films Jess made around the time of *Female Vampire* and there it was; the self-same wallpaper, indeed the same room, in 1974's *Lorna... the Exorcist* (below, left), in the scenes depicting Marielle (Catherine Laferrière), deprived of Lorna's company, going mad with lust in an isolated clinic run by Dr. Seward (Franco).

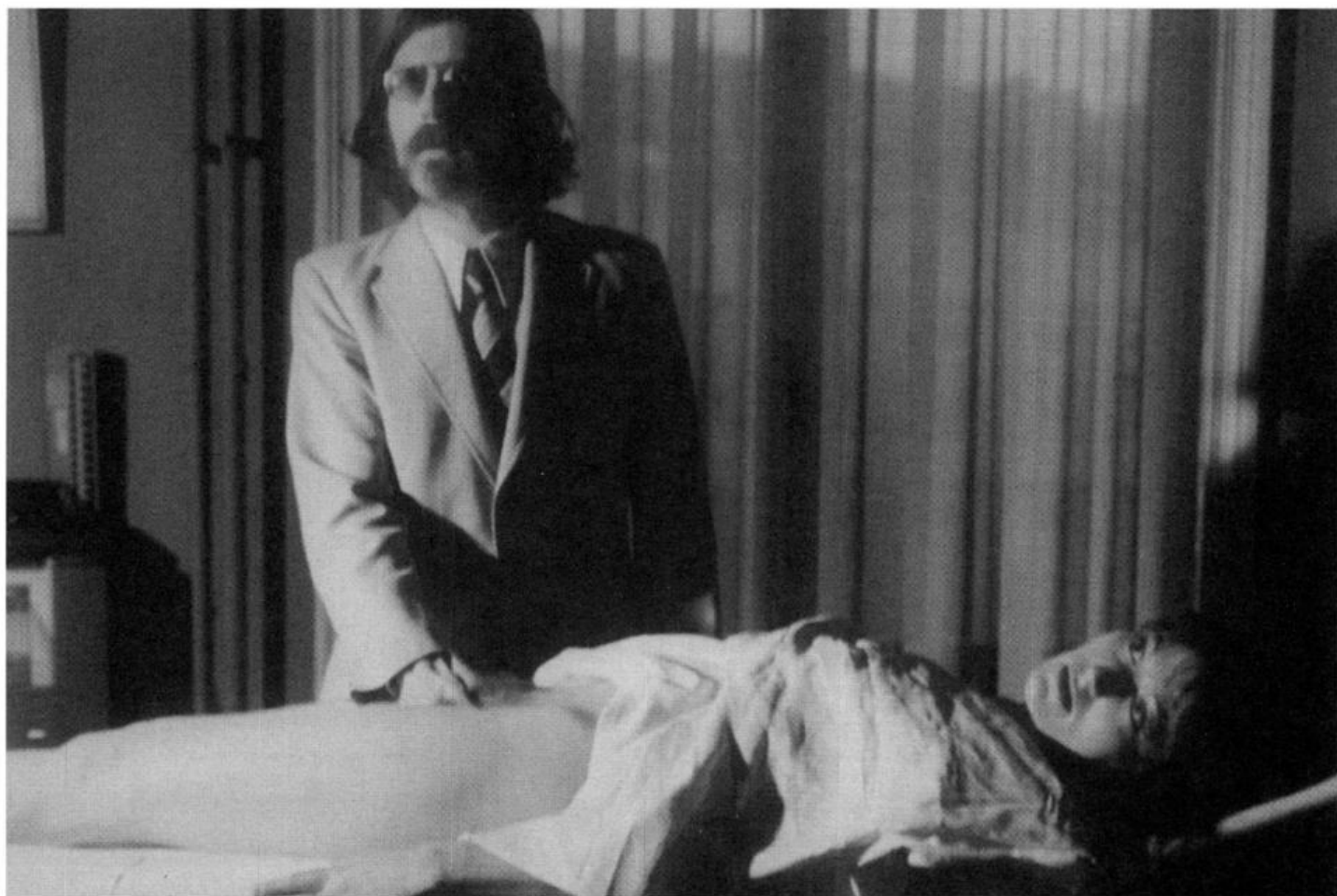
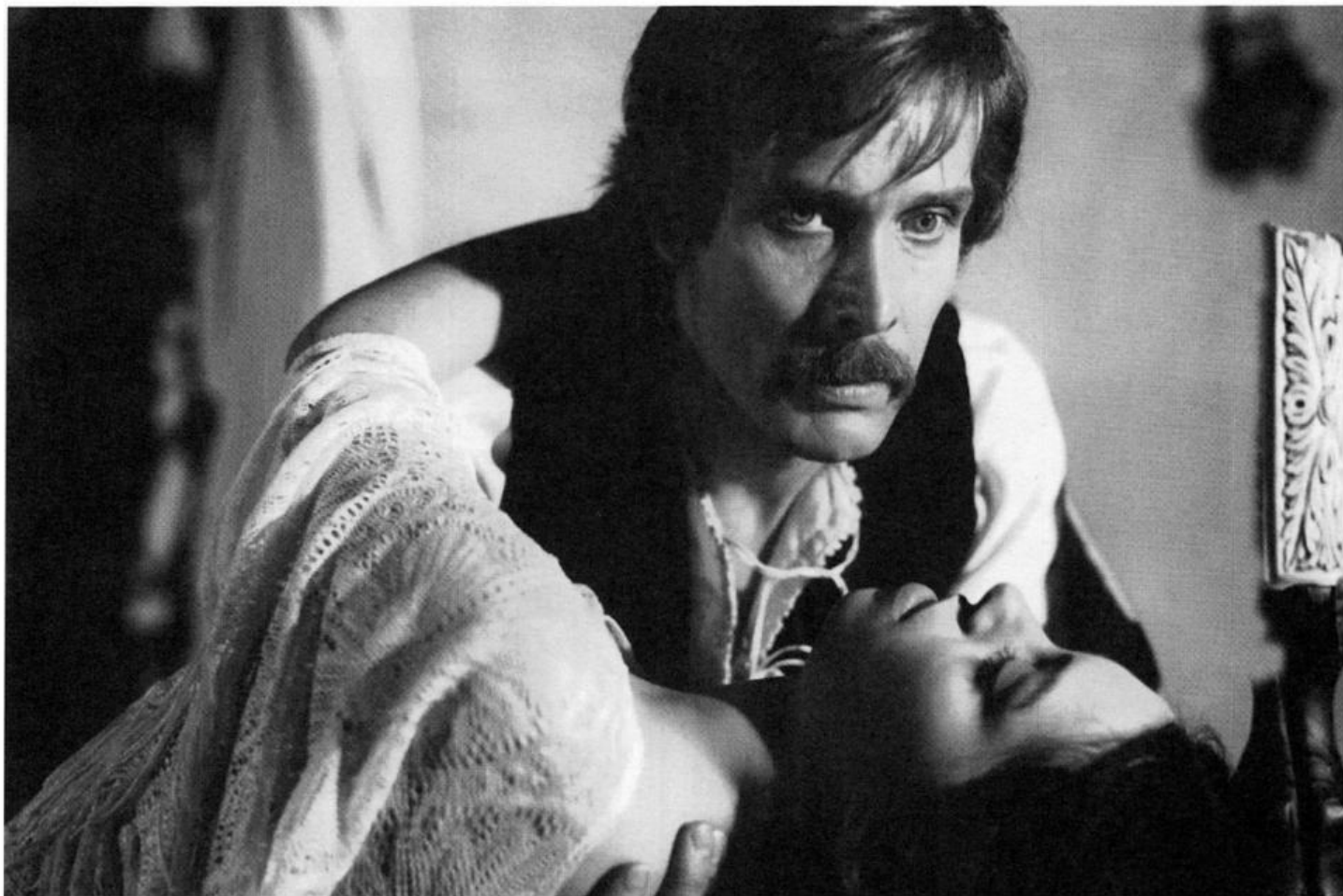


Monica Swinn doesn't appear in *Lorna... the Exorcist*, but the scene in which the possessed Linda (Romay) visits Marielle (Laferrière) at the clinic is strikingly similar in composition to the set-up with Romay and Swinn in the mystery scene above. True, Lina is wearing her vampire cloak in the picture, and a see-through blouse in *Lorna*, but the dynamic of the scene is very similar. I did wonder for a moment whether it was actually Laferrière in the picture, but no, it's definitely Monica Swinn. Besides, they're wearing different stockings, and the bolster on the bed has a floral cover in the photo but not in *Lorna*.

What I think may have happened is that when Franco shot the seduction scene in the wallpapered room - for either *Female Vampire* or *Lorna* - he also drafted in a second actress (either Laferrière or Swinn) to step in and duplicate the essential idea, with a view to using the same basic set-up in two films starring Romay. (Note that *Female Vampire* was made for Eurociné and *Lorna* was for CFFP.) You can see how he tries not to make it too obvious, because he changed the pictures on the wall and stripped the cover off the bolster in the *Lorna* shot (which when you think about it, suggests that the *Female Vampire* version was done first, after which he took off the bolster cover, removed the pictures, put Laferrière in Swinn's place, and filmed the scene again). Why go to this trouble? Maybe to avoid being accused of using funds from one film to shoot material for another? Quite why the extra scene with Swinn and Romay never made it into any currently known version of *Female Vampire* (and there are lots of them) I don't know. In the versions we do have, when Irina arrives at de Rochefort's residence, the latter says "I've been waiting for you, thank-you for coming". This is the first time we see her, which suggests that perhaps de Rochefort and Irina were meant to have an earlier scene together, and for some reason it never made the final cut.







*you take me with you one day, behind the mist?*" he asks, in the film's most quotable line. Taylor, though dressed like a ninny in clothes that seem to hail from a Black Adder parody of the metaphysical poets, keeps an admirably stoical visage, resembling a forlorn Miguel de Cervantes and turning scenes of aimless wandering into moody delights that help to connect the otherwise isolated set-pieces with the eerie landscape of Madeira. It's also worth stressing that it's only through *his* performance that we see what fatal pleasure might actually entail, as he surrenders to Irina in the final reel, shuddering and sobbing as his life-force drains away. It's a pleasure too when Monica Swinn and Alice Arno put in an appearance, over an hour into the film, playing a lesbian couple who invite Irina to their castle, intending to subjugate her into sexual slavery. Arno plays the submissive partner and Swinn the dominant, but when Swinn orders Arno to whip their new 'guest', the Countess silently turns the tables: Arno lashes her Mistress instead. Swinn's uncomprehending terror as the roles are reversed is brilliantly played.

For me the one major flaw is the way Franco deploys Daniel White's music. The title theme, which recurs several times throughout, is a beautiful arrangement for piano and strings, moving at a slow pace evocative of both swooning romance and aching dissolution. Working perfectly during the credits, it would also have made an excellent choice for the death throes of the victims. Yet, for reasons that are hard to fathom, Franco scores Ardid's death with a jaunty lounge-pop version of the piece, while Anna expires to a similar arrangement for cheery Herb Alpert trumpet. One has to say that these perverse choices ride roughshod over emotional engagement and risk obscuring the erotic dynamic. Ardid's terminal pleasure-ride, and Anna's surrender to vampiric cunnilingus, wilt beneath a shagpile carpet of toetapping seventies lounge music - which is funny, in a kitsch sort of way, but ultimately unhelpful. It's only when we reach the death of the lovelorn Baron von Rathony that the music matches the emotional core of a death scene, with the orchestral arrangement adding gravity and a sense of morbid ravishment.

Soundtrack malfunctions aside, Franco regards the life of Irina with fascination, but also with sensitivity and sympathy. The emotional focus is resolutely on her. Irina exists in a world of sex; her needs demand constant attention. As in the animal kingdom, where mating and hunting for food are a constant, for Irina sex over-rides everything; she's defined by it, she can find no release from it. The omnipresence of arousal may sound exciting, but it's also quite horrifying. In David Cronenberg's *Shivers*, made two years later, a character relates something an old man said to her in a dream: "...He tells me that everything is erotic, that everything is sexual [...] That even dying is an act of eroticism. That talking is sexual. That breathing is sexual. That even to physically exist is sexual." In *Shivers* this pan-erotic vision turns to physical reality, a development which Cronenberg depicts with studied ambivalence: the world in *Shivers* is way too uptight, but the alternative, an endless orgy, seems just

as oppressive. Cronenberg and Jess Franco may seem like odd bedfellows, but one can discern a similar theme in *Female Vampire*. Irina lives in a world dominated by desire; she must constantly hunt for sex partners, trapped on an endless treadmill of lust. The first time we see her she's dressed like a pornographic comic-strip character, bare-breasted and bare-cunted, in cape and belt and boots. To paraphrase *Shivers*, her style of dress is sexual, her interactions are sexual, her muteness is sexual, even her physical existence is sexual. And Franco, a somewhat melancholy sensualist, shares Cronenberg's ambivalence; hence Irina's sadness, and her internal musing: "*Why has my soul so much need of peace and love, when it cannot obtain it?*" The story ends with Irina, having sucked the life force from the Baron von Rathony, deciding to end her lonely existence. In a simultaneously poetic and puzzling scene she commits suicide by submerging herself in a bath of blood and water. (We must assume it's the water that kills her, as vampires are so often allergic to it.) But has Irina really escaped the despair of immortality? As the film glides to an end we hear distant voices calling her name (ancestors? victims?) and see her walking once again, through the same woods, the same mist, that enshrouded her at the beginning. It seems that Irina has *not* escaped: her melancholy journey will go on forever.

**Franco on screen:** Franco is delightfully shabby as coroner turned vampire investigator Dr. Roberts (no relation to his pill-popping near-namesake in the Beatles song). With long, greasy, uncombed hair, a scruffy beard, and a grubby overcoat, he looks as though he's been living rough in one of his own films for a few weeks...

**Cast and crew:** This was the first Franco film really to foreground Lina Romay, who plays to perfection the mute but hauntingly expressive vampire of the title. After several previous roles which revealed gradually more and more of her talent, here was her chance to prove she could hold centre stage, and she makes her mark indelibly. Ever since Soledad Miranda Franco had been looking for his screen muse, and in *La Comtesse Noire* he finds her. Romay shares Miranda's icy yet vulnerable quality but brings an additional dose of insolent sexuality.

**Music:** Daniel White's main theme for *La Comtesse noire* is his definitive achievement for Franco, and it haunts the screen with an allure part sentimental, part melancholic; a wistful memory wrapped in the cadences of a half-remembered MOR tune. (Some say it resembles 'I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles'; for me it prefigures Carly Simon's 1977 hit 'Nobody Does it Better'!) The arrangement is lush, achingly lovely, yet grave and sombre too. In one sequence it assumes the role of psychic sexual interloper, as the journalist senses the Countess while relaxing in her apartment, only to find herself unwittingly fondling her pussy. It's as if the music is the Countess, her refrain mingling with the subconscious lesbian fantasies of the victim, drawing her closer to death ... As noted already, Franco's schizophrenic scoring elsewhere generates a few giggles, as the woozy atmosphere is occasionally shattered by a jaunty 'lounge' version of the main theme. Although fun,

in a Herp-Alpert-meets-Piero-Umilian kind of way, the bossanova rhythms take the film into softcore frolic territory, playing oddly against the overall mood of sadness and surrender. Both the elegant and the kitschy versions of the theme were selected for a compilation of White's Franco music, *Ambianza Acoustica*, released in 1994 by Corélia.

**Locations:** Chiefly Funchal, Madeira: the Reids Palace Hotel is seen in the establishing shot for Ramón Ardid's death. Anna, the journalist, is staying at a hotel near the picturesque Café do Parque in Monte, in the hills overlooking Funchal. Tragically, the region suffered severe flooding and mudslides in February 2010 with the loss of many lives. The scene featuring Roger Germanes was filmed at a farm on the outskirts of Paris, while the interior scenes with Monica Swinn and Alice Arno were filmed in the city.

**UK theatrical release:** British cinema patrons really got shafted on this release, as the 'X' certificate version circulating as *The Bare Breasted Countess* ran for a pathetic 58m55s. This was actually the length submitted to the BBFC. The distributors, Cinecenta, would appear to have pre-cut the film themselves, no doubt hoping they'd avoid the sort of trouble they'd been having with previous Franco releases such as *The Demons* and *How to Seduce a Virgin*. The film was given its 'X' certificate on the 11th December 1975 and played UK sex cinemas from January 1976, including dates at the Leicester Penthouse, the Sheffield Penthouse and elsewhere. It appears not to have lingered, although it did turn up belatedly in *Continental Film Review* in June 1976, with a cover shot too.<sup>2</sup>

**Connections:** *La Comtesse noire*'s crude, reductive English-language title *Female Vampire* suggests, if we're being kind, the condensation of a theme to its essentials; so is this the definitive 'female vampire film'? The precursors, in the summer of 1973, were increasingly numerous. Lambert Hillyer's *Dracula's Daughter* (1936) from Universal Pictures provided the first example, complete with a hint of predatory lesbianism (as the Universal's press-book declared, "Women obeyed her commands! Men feared her power!"). Roger Vadim set the ball rolling with a faithful adaptation of Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* called *Blood and Roses* (1960); Camillo Mastrocinque's *Crypt of the Vampire* (1964) also drew on *Carmilla* but kept the lesbianism implied; Hammer got their teeth into the formula with Roy Ward Baker's *The Vampire Lovers* (1970), Jimmy Sangster's *Lust for a Vampire* (1971) and John Hough's *Twins of Evil* (1971); Harry Kumel added a dash of Continental absinthe with his extraordinary *Daughters of Darkness* (May 1971); and Jean Rollin staked his claim to the vampire crown with two magnificent ultra-low budget artworks, *Le Frisson des vampires* (April 1971) and *Requiem for a Vampire* (1971). Spanish director Vicente Aranda's *The Blood Spattered Bride* (released in September 1972) preceded *Female Vampire* by nearly a year. However, Franco had already initiated his own avant-garde take on the form with *Vampyros Lesbos*, shot in the summer of 1970 ... Also feeding into the iconography of *Female Vampire* is the comic-strip character Vampirella, born in 1969 with her own magazine from Warren Publishing. Vampirella's

character and backstory (a woman from the planet Drakulon who comes to Earth as a 'good vampire' to destroy our homegrown evil vampires) are irrelevant to Franco, but her physical appearance – a curvaceous, scantily clad woman in a red sling suit and shiny black knee-high boots – must surely have influenced his vision. Romy's black thigh-length boots and hip-hugging leather belt are as iconic and memorable as the Vampirella brand, with the removal of the sling-suit contributing even greater sexual frankness ... Franco's habit of recycling characters continues with an appearance from the blind son of Dr. Orloff (played in a delightfully eccentric performance by French film critic and early Franco admirer Jean-Pierre Bouyxou). When Dr. Roberts shows Orloff the cadaver of one of Irina's female victims, he ascertains the cause of death by fondling the snatch and stating that death occurred due to puncturing of the vaginal lips and deformation of the clitoris! When Roberts says that something must be done, Orloff sneers that he's aware of presences around him in the dark to which he now feels attracted: "How are we to know that the pleasure isn't worth life itself? Why fight against it? [...] In the deep silence all around me, I'm no longer alone. It's a new world, because I no longer need eyes to see [...] A world of wonder awaits, it's only up to you to belong to it!" And so the son of Dr. Orloff becomes a mystic (a development referred to in the 1988 film *Faceless*) ... Baron von Rathony reads a book that says Madeira is the location favoured by scientists for the mythical city of Atlantis – see *Les Exploits érotiques de Maciste dans l'Atlantide* ... an early scene intercutting a nude Jack Taylor shaving in a hotel mirror and Lina Romy getting dressed echoes a similar scene in Nicholas Roeg's *Don't Look Now* (1973) ... Orloff refers to the 'Cult of Panthos' whose activities can also be observed in *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein* and *La esclava blanca* (1985) ... The pathologizing of desire into something dangerous and depleting finds expression in several later Franco films, most notably *Shining Sex* (1975) and *Das Bildnis der Dorian Gray* (1975) ... Given that vampires live forever, Irina's sexual frustration is very much like the torture suffered by the heroine of Gerard Damiano's existential porno hit *The Devil in Miss Jones* (1973).

**Other versions:** *Female Vampire* has turned up in a bewildering number of variants over the years. Shot as *La Comtesse noire*, it was later released to French porno theatres with the addition of newly minted hardcore sequences, in a version retitled *Les Avaleuses* (reportedly 82m). A 'soft' theatrical version played in Belgium as *Femmes Vampires* aka *Vampier Vrouwen*, distributed by Cosmopolis Films. The hardcore version played theatres in West Germany, and eventually made it onto German video as *Lüsterne Vampire im Spermarausch* (85m). It features four insert sequences: the encounter at the bird sanctuary adds Romy, with a different hairstyle, fellating a semi-erect penis; the scene between Romy and Ramón Ardid gains explicit and tedious oral sex footage (which does at least lend plausibility to the idea that sex with the Countess exhausts a man to death); the scene in which Romy visits Anna in her bedroom gains a prolonged bout



of cunnilingus in which Romay nibbles the labia with her teeth (thus adding to the film's vampiristic imagery and backing up Dr. Orloff's diagnosis regarding puncturing of the vaginal lips and deformation of the clitoris); and finally, when the Countess kills Rathony, the penis from the Ramón Ardid insert makes a second appearance, as Jack Taylor's member! An Italian theatrical version called *Un caldo corpo di femmina* exists too, but I haven't been able to compare it.

*Les Avaleuses* surfaced on video in France in the early 1980s. The 'horror version' then turned up on the American 'Force Video' label as *Erotikill* (72m), in a version that omits the hardcore, removes the sexual aspect of Irina's attacks, and substitutes alternate scenes showing her sucking blood from her victims via the neck; for instance, the encounter at the aviary concludes with Romay biting Roger Germanes' throat, rather than kneeling to fellate him. Explicit shots of Romay's pussy are concealed by her black cape, which she wears even during her bedroom scenes, and Jean-Pierre Bouyxou's fondling of Monica Swinn's snatch is replaced with a rather less transgressive shot of him feeling her neck. (Incidentally, the back of the 'Force Video' cover uses a still from *Virgin among the Living Dead*!) A shorter version of this edit was released in Finland as *The Bare Breasted Countess* (68m43s). A second US video release as *The Loves of Irina* (Private Screenings) peddled the softcore sex version (minus the S&M), and reportedly includes a brief glimpse of hardcore during the Ramón Ardid scene which is missing from all other versions. Circulating during the 1990s, a grey market edition also called *The Bare Breasted Countess* (not to be confused with the Finland tape) edited together all of the hardcore and all the additional bloodsucking footage to reach a brain-dissolving 110m. In Italy a version turned up on video as *Erotikiller* (67m10s) with most of the sexual content cut out. There's also a video version called *Verentahrima Morsian* ('The Bloodstained Bride') from Finland, and *Erotikill Lady Dracula 2* from Germany. In the days before DVD, the definitive cut was the English-language *Female Vampire* from Redemption Benelux, which ran for 97m19s, letterboxed at 2.35:1. An earlier cut from Redemption UK ran for just 91m53s due to BBFC cuts, eliminating shots of Ramón Ardid's penis in Lina Romay's mouth, shots of Romay masturbating over Anna's corpse, the second half of the S&M sequence, and Dr. Orloff fingering the corpse's vagina. The French video *La Comtesse aux seins nus* (95m12s) is identical to the Redemption tape, but cuts a zoom from the S&M scene, skips the final minute of Romay's fatal lovemaking with Taylor, and strangely, loses the shot of the Madeiran landscape as a voice on the soundtrack cries 'Irina'. A German variant, *Entfesselt Berlerde* (88m46s), is identical to the Redemption version except that it cuts the S&M scene. Finally, Redemption's 2012 Blu-ray release features a 100m erotic version, *Female Vampire*, and a 70m horror version, *Erotikill*, the combined heft of which brings together all extant footage with the exception of the hardcore inserts.

**Problematica:** Though listed in *Obsession* as playing the Inspector, Richard Kendall (aka Ricardo Vázquez) does not appear in the film. Anne Watican is frequently identified as playing Anna the journalist, and she's also credited on IMDb as 'woman in tavern' in Jean Rollin's *Les Démoniaques* (1974). However, I can't see the same actress in both films and have not been able to source her only other credit, Guy Gibert's obscure porno *Les Baiseuses* (1975).

## NIGHT OF THE SKULL

### Spain 1973

Spanish depósito legal number. M-28390/73

*Original theatrical title in country of origin*

**La noche de los asesinos** (*The Night of the Murderers*)

*Alternative titles*

**Sospiri** (IT theatrical) *Sighs*

**Im Schatten des Mörders** (GER theatrical)

*In the Shadow of the Killer*

**Los asesinos atacan de noche** (MEX theatrical)

*The Killers Attack at Night*

**Night of the Assassins** (UK alt.)

*Production companies*

**Cooperativa Fénix Films** (Madrid)

**Copercines Cooperativa Cinematográfica** (Madrid)

*Theatrical distributors*

**Chamartín Producciones y Distribuciones** (Madrid)

*Timeline*

Shooting date	November	1973
Sitges Festival screening	29 September	1974
Madrid	08 November	1976
Italy (Florence)	14 July	1977
Barcelona	10 April	1979

*Theatrical running time*

Spain	82m
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**Cast:** **Alberto Dalbés** (Major Oliver Brooks). **Evelyn Scott** (Lady Marta Tobias). **William Berger** (Baron Simon Tobias). **Maribel Hidalgo** (Lady Cecilia Marian). **Lina Romay** (Rita Derian, Lord Marian's daughter). **Vicente Roca** (Inspector Boré). **Yelena Samarina** (Deborah Potts, Archibald's servant). **Antonio Mayans** (Alfred Marian, Archibald's son). **Ángel Menéndez**

(Lord Archibald Percival Marian). **Luis Barboo** (Rufus Potts, Archibald's manservant). **Giok Swan Heinze-Thung** [as 'Swan Heinze'] (Mairu Pagan, Albert's wife). **José María Palacios** (coroner). **José Martínez Blanco** [as 'P. Martínez'] (Brian C. Loy, the notary). **Ricardo Vázquez** (chief inspector). **Jess Franco** (Eddy Pimperton, Brooks' assistant). *uncredited*: **Dan Van Husen** (Albert Pagan). **Ramón Ardid** (Agent Robinson, Boré's assistant).

*Credits*: directed by **Jess Franco**. based on the story "The Cat and the Canary" by **Edgar Allan Poe**. screenplay: **Jess Franco & James P. Jhonson**. director of photography: **Javier Pérez Zofio**. editor: **Antonio Gimeno**. music: **Carlo Savina**. produced by **Arturo Marcos Tejedor**. production manager: **Antonio Cervera García**. assistant production: **Luis F. Rodríguez**. assistant director: **Ricardo Vázquez**. camera operator: **Enrique Salete**. camera assistant: **Manuel Mateos**. stills: **Maximo López Piedra**. property master: **Andrés Santana**. seamstress: **Victoria Ayllón**. make-up: **Adela del Pino**. assistant make-up: **Elena Cervera de la Torre**. hairstylist: **Carmen Sánchez**. assistant editor: **Mercedes Gimeno**. filmed in **Techniscope**. colour: **Eastmancolor**. laboratory: **Fotofilm, S.A.**. sound re-recording: **Arcofón, S.A.**. costumes: **Peris Hermanos**. music publisher: **CAM Española, S.A.**

**Synopsis**: *19th Century Louisiana. When Lord Archibald Percival Marian is buried alive by a killer wearing a rubber skull-mask, his wife Lady Cecilia Marian, and his servants, Deborah Potts and her husband Rufus, expect to inherit. Inspector Boré arrives to begin the investigation, assisted by Major Oliver Brooks, recently arrived from Scotland Yard. Brooks says he has special knowledge about Lord Marian's will, but refuses to divulge it. The rest of the family are summoned for the reading of the will: the first to arrive are the deceased's cousin, Baron Simon Tobias, and his wife Lady Marta Tobias. The family notary, Brian Loy, reveals that Lord Marian left two wills; one to be read in the event of a natural death, and the other in case he is murdered. The latter being the case, the will leaves everything to his illegitimate daughter Rita Derian. Conceived during Marian's affair with a black servant girl, she lives in the family mansion but is despised and regularly beaten by her Aunt Cecilia. That night, Cecilia is murdered by the masked assassin, who ties her to a coastal promontory where she drowns during a raging storm. On the same day, Lord Archibald's cousin Albert Pagan, the black sheep of the family, arrives with his Chinese wife Mairu. Also arriving is Alfred Marian, Lord Marian's son. Brooks orders the reading of the other will, which turns out to divide the Marian estate between Cecilia, Simon, Marta, Albert, and Alfred: he then reveals that Lady Cecilia's body has been found. The inspector orders everyone to stay at the mansion while the investigation proceeds. At dinner, Alfred Pagan sees a portrait of Lord Marian and reacts with shock; later, he tells his wife that although he hasn't seen his cousin for many years, the portrait was not the man he knew. During a séance conducted by Mairu to contact the dead man, Rufus leaps from the shadows and stabs Albert and Mairu to death.*

*The police give chase and shoot him. Meanwhile, the masked assassin murders Deborah by tying her up and setting fire to her. Rufus confesses to the murders on his hospital death-bed, saying they were necessary because Albert had discovered the truth about the fake Lord Marian. It transpires that the dead man, whose real name was Jennings, took the place of the real Lord Marian with the connivance of his wife Cecilia, and his servants Deborah and Rufus. Inspector Boré announces that the real Lord Marian wrote the other will. The dead man's share will therefore be split between Simon, Marta and Albert. Albert tells Rita that he's glad she's not his real half-sister because he has feelings for her. Simon murders his wife by drowning her in the bathtub to prevent her from revealing that he was the fourth conspirator, alongside Jennings, Cecilia and Deborah. The masked assassin appears and reveals himself as 'Major Oliver', actually the real Lord Marian, who is not dead after all. The four conspirators threw him into the sea, believing him dead, but he was rescued by fishermen. Suffering amnesia, he started a new life and became a police detective. One day he visited the Marian estate in Yorkshire and recognised his home. He set about killing the four conspirators, drawing on a list of Biblical punishments relating to earth, water, fire and air. Marian shoots Simon Tobias dead, then turns his attentions to Rita. Despite her innocence he despises her as a mulatto and a relative of Jennings. He is about to kill her when Inspector Boré shoots him dead.*

**Production notes**: *La noche de los asesinos* re-united Franco with *Un silencio de tumba* cinematographer Javier Pérez Zofio. The filming, which took place at Cabo Roig in Orihuela during early November, almost ended in tragedy, according to a news story in the Spanish press at the time: "Actress Maribel Hidalgo nearly drowned during the filming of a scene from *La noche de los asesinos* by Jesús Franco, which takes place on the beaches of this region. For the scene in question, Maribel Hidalgo was abducted from a castle and thrown into the sea with her hands and feet tied. While filming this last sequence, the actress suffered a blackout, apparently having low blood pressure, and had to be removed from the water by colleagues. Shooting was suspended while the necessary medical attention was given."<sup>1</sup>

**Review**: With a torrid, storm-ridden atmosphere redolent of early sixties Italian horrors like Antonio Margheriti's *Castle of Blood* or Mario Bava's *The Whip and the Flesh*, *Night of the Skull* gets off to a thundercracking start. A stern patriarch alone in his study reads a bible late at night, dwelling on a vengeful passage describing God's anger at dissolute mankind. A masked figure pounces, beating the old man round the head and burying him alive in the garden, amid howling winds and lashing rain...

In a year of such exotic mutations as *Countess Perverse* and *Female Vampire*, it's startling to see a Franco film like this, in which the camerawork is sober and controlled, and the pacing conventional throughout. There are no huge spikes of excitement, granted, but there are no slow-motion troughs either. Even the editing patterns are clean, rational, orderly; hardly what one expects from Franco at his early seventies fever-pitch. He obviously went to some trouble





to make this a genuine commercial proposition. The emphasis is firmly on shadows and menace; sex and surrealism are kept at arm's length, and instead what we get is a sort of cross between the Italian Gothic horrors of the 1960s and the German 'krimis' of the same period. Those regular Franco standbys, flagellation and incest, are corralled into a brief scene of Lina Romay being whipped by drunken stepmother Maribel Hidalgo, and a will-they-won't-they sibling romance between Romay and Mayans which turns out to be not quite the moral quagmire they think it is. Basically, you can forget about rape and torture for a while, and concentrate instead on gloomy mansions, shadowy corridors, conniving relatives, masked villains in the dead of night, and sinister characters who are not what they seem.

There are, however, some shaky buttresses in this old-dark-house drama. For instance, *Night of the Skull* seems at first to be set in England, complete with references to characters travelling from Brighton, and others complaining that they need to get back to London. Everyone speaks with British accents, and despite the Hispanic appearance of several key players, these Lords, Ladies, Barons and Majors are clearly supposed to be members of the British upper classes. However, a preponderance of bootlace ties and a policeman with a cowboy hat set alarm bells ringing, until at last it transpires that the characters are holed up at an estate in Louisiana, belonging to an English emigré whose decision to relocate to the USA is important to later plot developments. The film's sense of geography is woefully unstable: the long distances being discussed are too casually sketched in, so that turn-of-the-century trans-Atlantic travel begins to seem as instantaneous as a trip via *Star Trek* transporter. In addition, the film's complicated plot tends to fall apart under scrutiny, and a plethora of minor characters are so fleetingly introduced that it's hard keeping track of who's who. Franco may have chosen to mount a more conventional production, but it's evidently been written without a second draft and filmed at breakneck speed; consequently it's not just the shadowy lighting that obscures.

What the film really lacks are a few baroque flourishes – a more mobile camera for instance, to augment the masked marauder prowling through the shadowy house and grounds. Still, *Night of the Skull* is sufficiently moody and compelling to hold one's attention. Ersatz Bava it may be, but it's a hell of a lot more successful than *Un silencio de tumba* (which felt like a failed attempt to relive the daffy delights of Bava's *Five Dolls for an August Moon*). Though *Night of the Skull* is definitely a minor work, it deserves more acclaim, and it probably looked glorious on the big screen...

**Julian Grainger adds:** This comes on strong like an Agatha Christie *Ten Little Indians* type film, with the main audience expectation being a final reveal as to which of the ghastly family or its employees is the killer – only here everything is revealed about forty-seven minutes in, when Dan Van Husen's Albert Pagan character reveals to his Chinese medium wife that the portrait of Lord Marian in the dining room isn't in fact Lord Marian after all.

Their attempt to contact him in a sort of séance is interrupted when Rufus – a grotesquely over-acting Luis Barboo – kills them both. (It's a real shame about Barboo: on the whole the acting from the cast is good to excellent but the fact that he's the classic red-herring 'butler-did-it' character, never blinks, and has *that* face must have made the audience giggle as if he were wandering through the film with a huge red arrow suspended above his head. He's meant to be frightening and not a little loopy, but really! Rufus's confession as he lays dying in hospital, followed by his extreme reaction to seeing Alberto Dalbés' Major Brooks character, pretty much gives away the whole whodunit. Furthermore, Brooks asks Rufus, "*Who killed the real Lord Marian?*", as if suddenly this is common knowledge when surely only Rufus and Vicente Roca's Inspector Boré could possibly know this – unless of course it is Brooks who is the killer. Brooks later talks to Antonio Mayan's character Alfredo, who tells him that underlined passages in *The Book of the Apocalypse* correspond to the "*ways in which Jennings, Cecilia and Deborah were murdered.*" There was no effective exposition to explain the strange goings-on: apparently Jennings is the real name of Ángel Menéndez's character, but who he really was and how he was working for Dalbés is not made clear. On a similar theme, when the killer removes his skull-mask, William Berger's Baron Simon Tobias reacts in astonishment and identifies him immediately as Lord Marian: surely he would have seen – and identified – him during the investigation? Finally, when Dalbés reveals that he is about to kill his illegitimate daughter, he calls her "*Jennings' daughter*". It seems to me that the story structure is muddled and the exposition hopeless. Perhaps it is Franco's nascent free-form film-making that clashes with the sort of murder mystery that stands or falls by its careful plotting.

**Franco on screen:** Franco turns up towards the end of the film in an underdeveloped but amusing role as Eddy, alcoholic sidekick to Alberto Dalbés' brooding, quizzical investigator.

**Cast and crew:** *Night of the Skull* sees the handsome and engaging Antonio Mayans making his Franco debut. He would go on to become one of the director's most indispensable collaborators in the 1980s ... Giok Swan Heinze-Thung, aka Susan Swan or Swan Heinz, plays Mairu, a young medium married to Dan Van Husen's Albert Pagan. In fact she really was dating Van Husen at the time; he introduced her to Franco, who liked her and asked her to appear in *Night of the Skull* and one further film, *Kiss Me Killer*. Heinze-Thung, then living in Madrid, was a recent graduate in medicine at Freiburg University, she later married a Swiss dentist and now lives in Switzerland.

**Music:** Carlo Savina's score is a strident Gothic-noir confection, led by a theme for saxophone and strings which intelligently overlays American and European influences. There are distant echoes of Carlo Rustichelli's music for Mario Bava's *Blood and Black Lace*, and a direct lift from Savina's own score for Bava, *Lisa and the Devil* (a composition for strings, flute and xylophone heard during a séance convened by Pagan's Oriental wife). Savina was a

veteran Italian composer whose work graced numerous peplums, spaghetti westerns and historical epics in the 1960s. His horror and thriller scores include *Crypt of the Vampire* (1964), *The Young, the Evil and the Savage* (1968), *Malenka, Niece of the Vampire* (1969), *Ombre roventi* (1970), *Night of the Damned* (1971), *The Female Butcher* (1973), and *The Killer Reserved Nine Seats* (1974).

**Locations:** Shot in Alicante and Orihuela, Spain.

**Connections:** As the credits admit, *Night of the Skull* owes much to the classic 'old dark house' story *The Cat and the Canary*, borrowing settings, ambience, and basic plot details. However, the credits attribute the source material to Edgar Allan Poe, which is, of course, untrue – *The Cat and the Canary* began as a play written in 1922 by John Willard, the success of which led to screen adaptation. Paul Leni directed the first version, in 1927, winning acclaim for his merging of German Expressionist and Hollywood styles. Certain details in *Night of the Skull* have their origin not in the Willard play but the Leni film, including such elements as a second will that contradicts the first. Franco dispenses, however, with certain key visuals, like the ghostly hands reaching from the shadows to menace greedy relatives, and the denouement is completely off-the-wall and in no way accurate to either source. It also has no connection to the 1965 play of the same name by Cuban-born dramatist José Triana ... The Biblical text from which Lord Marian reads at the start of the film is Deuteronomy Chapter 13, Verses 19 to 24 ... the name 'Lord Marian' returns from Franco's debut, *Tenemos 18 años*, in which he's a villainous murderer in the imaginations of the film's fanciful heroines.

**Other versions:** *Obsession* lists a running time of 87 minutes, five minutes longer than the versions currently available on DVD from Tartan and Image Entertainment. The missing content of any longer version is unknown.

## LA CASA DEL AHORCADO [Unfinished]

*House of the Hanged*

**Spain 1973**

*Alternative titles*

**Le Manoir du pendu** (FR language version of shooting title)

*Production company*

**Films Manacoa P.C.** (Madrid)

*Timeline*

Shooting date	November	1973
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**Cast:** Antonio Mayans. Lina Romay. Alberto Dalbés. Dan Van Husen. Giok Swan Heinze-Thung. Vicente Roca.

**Credits:** director: **Jess Franco**. screenplay: **Jess Franco**. producer: **Jess Franco**. production manager: **Antonio Cervera García**. property master: **Andrés Santana**. still photography: **Ramón Ardid**. seamstress: **Victoria Ayllón**. colour: **Eastmancolor**

**Production notes:** While shooting *La noche de los asesinos* for Arturo Marcos, Franco saw an opportunity to cram in another production using some of the same locations and actors. Sadly *La casa del ahorcado* was never finished: Franco described it to Alain Petit as, "the most esoteric story I have shot in my life", adding "I started shooting with my own funds pending the collaboration of Arturo Marcos, which never occurred." Antonio Mayans, one of the actors taking part, told me: "I started with *La noche de los asesinos*, that was the first one. I was called to do that one only, in Orihuela. We were staying near the beach. We weren't swimming in the hotel swimming pool, so if I wasn't swimming, it must not have been so hot. On *La noche de los asesinos* we were hired for a four week shoot. We only did two or three weeks. When we finished, on Friday of that week, Jess said that tomorrow we start shooting again, without telling us that we were going to make another film. But he didn't mention anything about the wardrobe! *La noche de los asesinos* is a costume drama, but he said I should wear a white shirt and black trousers, which didn't have anything to do with the other film! I didn't say anything, we just started the shoot near the swimming pool, which was totally out of period! On *La noche* we had to shoot in places that looked classical, 19th century, but this had nothing to do with that. Some of the guys said 'oh no, this is another film', and decided they didn't want to stay, but I stayed. On Monday we started shooting, and we did this other film. We were shooting in a discotheque, in the hotel where we were staying, and Dan Van Husen had gone through a very tiring make-up session. They made a cut on his forehead, everything bleeding and gory. All of a sudden, (Andrés) Santana, the production manager, said 'let's go let's go', and Jess said let's go, and we packed up and set off to *La Vila Joiosa*, Benidorm. I was playing a guy playing guitar by a pool, and then I was going to be hanged from a tree. We stayed there and did two or three films."

## LASCIVIA [Unfinished]

**Spain 1973**

*Alternative title*

**Lascive** (FR language version of shooting title)

*Timeline*

Shooting date	1973
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**Cast:** Lina Romay.

**Credits:** director/screenplay/producer: **Jess Franco**.

**Production notes:** Little is known about this project, except that Franco and Romay were talking it up to Alain Petit in the press in 1974. It's likely that only a few minutes were actually shot.

French visa issued ( <i>Nuits brûlantes...</i> )	18 December	1974
France ( <i>Les Nuits brûlantes...</i> )	26 April	1975
Italy (Ciriè, Turin) ( <i>La felicità...</i> )	30 January	1979

## THE HOT NIGHTS OF LINDA

**France & Italy 1973/4**

French visa number: 42452

*Original theatrical title in country of origin*

**Les Nuits brûlantes de Linda** (FR theatrical [hardcore])

*The Hot Nights of Linda*

**La felicità nel peccato** (IT theatrical) *Happiness in Sin*

*Alternative titles*

**But Who Raped Linda?** (alt. theatrical English-language title)

**Mais qui donc a violé Linda? (plaisir solitaire)** (FR softcore re-release) *But Who Raped Linda? (Solitary Pleasure)*

**Habitación prohibida** (SP video) *Forbidden Room*

**Les Nuits brûlantes** (FR video cover) *The Hot Nights*

**Caresses de chattes** (FR alt. theatrical) *Pussy Caresses*

**Come with Me My Blond Emmanuelle** [see 'Other versions']

**Come Closer, Blond Emmanuelle** (print title)

**Brutal Nights of Linda** (unofficial DVD release)

**Mais qui donc a violé Linda? (Morbosité)** (front page of Franco's story treatment)

**Cette femme perverse...** ('David Khunne' source novel cited on Franco's story treatment) *This Evil Woman*

*Unconfirmed titles*

**Qui a violé Linda?** [Eurociné book] *Who Raped Linda?*

**Morbosité** [Eurociné book] *Morbidity*

**Linda La Maison des pécheresses** [MF] *Linda, House of Sin*

**La Maison des pécheresses** (Belgian theatrical title?)

**Les Petites Filles sauvages** [Eurociné website] *The Savage Girls*

*Production companies*

**Eurociné** (Paris)

**Parva Cinematografica** (Rome)

*Theatrical distributors*

**Eurociné** (Paris)

**Koala Cinematografica** (Rome)

*Timeline*

Spanish shoot	circa November	1973
Paris shoot	circa 21 January	1974
UK 'X' granted ( <i>Erotic Dreams</i> )	18 September	1974

*Theatrical running time*

France (*Les Nuits brûlantes de Linda*) 79m

Italy (*La felicità nel peccato*) 79m

Export version (as *But Who Raped Linda?*) 80m

**Cast:** **Alice Arno** (Marie-France Bertrand). **Lina Romay** (Olivia Radeck / FR: Olivia Steiner). **Paul Müller** (Paul Radeck / FR: Mr Steiner). **Pierre Taylou** (Abdul, Radeck's servant). **Richard Deconninck** [aka Bigotini] (Bigoti, employment agency boss/private investigator [*two roles*]). **Catherine Laferrière** (photo-journalist). **Angelo Bassi** [credited onscreen but not visible in any available prints]. **Giuseppe Mattei** [as 'James Harris'] (Lorna's lover). *uncredited:* **Verónica Llimera** (Linda Radeck / FR: Linda Steiner). **Monica Swinn** (Lorna Radeck / FR: Lorna Steiner).

**Credits:** director: **Jess Franco**. screenplay & adaptation: **A.L. Mariaux**, **G.F. [Gianfranco] Riccioli**, **R. Piseri**. director of photography: **Gérard Brissaud**. music by **Ian Wind**, **Charles Gordanne**. producer: **Daniel Lesoeur**. 1st assistant director: **Gianni Martucci** [as 'G.A. Martueici']. 2nd assistant director: **Pierre Catesson**. continuity: **Ilona Kunesova**. production manager: **Marius Lesoeur**. production supervisor: **Madeleine Quinquandon**. cameraman: **Max Lechevalier**. make-up: **Adda Moranti**. colour: **Telecolor** (Rome). laboratory: **S.I.M.**. music publisher: **Tremplin-Delphine**. *FR version* post-synchronisation: **Jean Louis**, **Annie Alberti**. studios: **Sincronizzazione Elettronica Calpini** (Rome). *IT version* dialogue: **Lorenzo Artale**. sound re-recorded at **Doppiaggio Internazionale** (Rome).

**Note:** Different prints credit different directors: *Les Nuits brûlantes de Linda* credits 'J.P. Johnson', *La felicità nel peccato* credits 'Rick Deconinck' (aka Bigotini).

**Synopsis:** *Marie-France accepts a job working for overbearing patriarch Paul Radeck, ostensibly to look after his two daughters: the sly and sensually provocative Olivia, and Linda, a disturbed mute. Linda is "the fruit of sin" according to Radeck, and Olivia elaborates that Linda is not Radeck's daughter but the result of another man's cuckolding. Spying on the house from an apartment nearby are a cop and a female 'photo-journalist', investigating whether or not Radeck killed his wife. In Olivia's dreams, she sees Radeck entering a bedroom and slashing a man's throat while his wife lies screaming beneath. Radeck 'sees' his dead wife Lorna in their old bedroom and begs her forgiveness ... Olivia seduces Abdul, the household's retarded manservant, in order to get from him the key to Radeck's bedroom. Radeck catches them and drags Abdul to the cellar where he whips him. Meanwhile, Olivia gains entrance to the room, and poses as Radeck's dead wife...*



**Production notes:** Some time between late November 1973 and January 1974, on Spanish locations between Orihuela and Alicante, Franco shot material for three films: *Les Nuits brûlantes de Linda*, *Aime-moi assassin* (aka *Kiss Me Killer*) and *Des Frissons sur la peau* (later to be known as *Tender and Perverse Emanuelle*). All three then required further shooting in Paris, in February or March 1974. With the addition of *Female Vampire* and one more film (*Exorcism* or *Les Gloutonnes*) this could well be the period to which Franco alluded in a 1975 interview with *Sex Stars System* in which he claimed to have worked on five films simultaneously!<sup>1</sup>

**Review:** *The Hot Nights of Linda* is one of Franco's most claustrophobic films, carrying with it a sense of sheer stifling pressure. It's not exactly fun, but if you don't mind letting Franco hold a pillow over your face for eighty minutes you should really seek this one out. Superficially uneventful but choked with suppressed darkness, it's a troublesome movie that falls just short of greatness but nevertheless lingers in the mind, like a traumatic memory that won't fade away...

Morbidly is the key note, established straight away during the Parisian credit sequence, in which Marie-France (Alice Arno), walks by the Seine. An attractive young woman, she has just secured a well-paid job as governess for a rich household, but as she heads home along the city streets on a drizzly afternoon, grey skies transform the romance of Paris into a parade of rain-sodden murkiness (if this is the city of lovers, they just signed a suicide pact and jumped off the Pont Neuf). Things sink even further into gloom with the introduction of Paul Radeck, Marie-France's new employer, an embittered patriarch lost in a mire of self-pitying neurosis. Cuckolded by his wife some time ago, he repeatedly returns to the now disused bedroom in which his wife committed her betrayal. As the film gives up its secrets, we realise that Radeck is the agent of his own misery, having murdered his wife to avenge dishonour. Bereft of love, he fights a bitter rearguard action, playing the 'angry father' to two teenage girls, one of whom was adopted after the death of a relative, the other possibly sired by another man. Despite his pain, it's near-impossible to sympathise with him. He's a blustering authoritarian, symbolically castrated, trying to govern what's left of his household with pathetic displays of temper. No love or sentiment can enter his world, except for a necrophiliac obsession with his dead wife which he mistakes for remorse. He's one of Franco's most damned creations.

The Radeck house, as one would expect in a Franco film, is perched by the ocean, overlooking a beautiful coastline, but while the exterior is a glorious Mediterranean sun-trap, the gloom of the interior dominates. Like a drug fiend hiding from daylight behind blinds and drawn curtains, Radeck shuns the fresh air. Scenes of Olivia sunbathing on the balcony, or Linda being taken for an outing by the sea, come and go very quickly. Edgar Allan Poe would have recognised this decadent, moribund household, within which a murderous secret, a brutal patriarch, and several varieties of

sexual dysfunction fester. Incest in the literal sense is not depicted (Radeck is tricked into kissing Olivia) but the film is still a curdling vision of familial implosion. Franco conjures this in a setting that could have seemed warm and modern and comfortable, but instead he achieves a malign transformation, turning a beautiful holiday home into a domain of sickness and shadow.

Entering this chamber of horrors, Marie-France is alternately virtuous and haughty. She's sweet and nurturing with Olivia and Linda, but takes a snooty dislike to simple-minded servant Abdul, gratuitously whacking him in the face and pushing him around. From her upper-crust accent (in the English-language version at least) we surmise that she's a woman from a wealthy background who's fallen on hard times: no doubt she regards the handyman as an unwelcome reminder of her now relatively menial status.

Undoubtedly the most accomplished presence is Lina Romay, who plays the insane, seductive Olivia. *The Hot Nights of Linda* is a highlight of her first year as Franco's muse, a runner-up only to *Female Vampire*. Facing off against Arno's posh blonde, Romay's eyes flash with obscure threat and a cold, displaced amusement: hostility and seductiveness intermingled. Olivia is indolent, narcissistic, and amoral: "*Marvellous to live without a sense of time,*" she says, lounging around naked in front of the new governess and expressing what could almost be the mission statement of Franco's narcotically atemporal cinema. She is the dark heart of the film, her erotic fixations generating the sensual steam that the 'House of Radeck' tries to suppress, leading to an explosion of violence and aberrant behaviour. She claims to be a virgin, announcing, "*I only make love by myself,*" and mentions a 'dream lover' who creates "*a horrible pain, and at the same time a deep satisfying pleasure.*" Speaking for many of those trapped in Franco's world of echoes and recurrences, she says, "*Every night I relive the same strange dream.*" In whichever version you see, whether she's molesting Linda in a memorably lewd and bloody scene with a banana (*Les Nuits brûlantes de Linda*), or running amok and killing Abdul with a giant medieval pike (*But Who Raped Linda?*), Romay is the wanton heart of an otherwise stiflingly airless film (see 'Other versions').

Linda is played by Verónica Llimera, one of Franco's less expressive actresses, although her role as a traumatised mute obviously limits her ability to shine here. Talked about by others only briefly, Linda remains an enigma. All that we can see is that she loves Abdul; the last straw for the poor girl comes when she sees him in bed with her tormentor Olivia. The latter's descent into psychosis is easier to read; immense sexual frustration, trauma from the loss of her parents, and a burgeoning incestuous attraction to her uncle, a man incapable of love.

Structurally, the end folds back to the beginning, and all is not as it seemed: the book Marie-France was reading at the start turns out to be a potboiler called 'But Who Raped Linda?' (the original English-language title for the film). It seems events at the Radeck house were just a dream, experienced by Marie-France after she fell asleep reading a lurid paperback. In classic *Twilight Zone* style,

the doorbell then rings and her agent appears, ready to take her to her new job at the Radecks. If the majority of what we've seen occurs in Marie-France's troubled mind, we can now make sense of actions that seemed random and unmotivated, such as her slapping Abdul for no reason on the briefest of acquaintances. In dreams, such impulsive actions are commonplace. Note too that Olivia's bedroom is just a redressed version of Marie-France's apartment; the wallpaper is the same, and a distinctive shelving unit behind the headboard has been concealed with a carefully arranged piece of fabric. (An intentional dream echo of Marie-France's 'real-life' bedroom, or an expedience demanded by the hasty shooting schedule? Let's be generous and say both.) With this in mind, one dutifully begins to reconsider the film as a revelation of the dreamer – except that there's really nowhere to go with such a reading. We scarcely see anything of Marie-France in her waking life – she applies for a job, goes home in the rain, reads a paperback – so any attempt at a psychological approach is mere shadowplay (even allowing for the absurdity of 'psychoanalysing' fictional characters). If the Radecks are Marie-France's oneiric inventions, she clearly has her own incestuous issues to deal with, but beyond noting this, and using the dream to explain a few offbeat reactions, there's little to be gained. Perhaps Franco is proposing *himself* as the analytical subject – a dreamer depraved by pulp fiction!

There is another possibility: that the circularity is just a cheap script device, in which case the film is a shaggy-dog story brought to a convenient conclusion by a massive cliché. It has to be said that *The Hot Nights of Linda* lacks *something*: some degree of bite, or focus, a memorable set-piece, or a dominant image of horror. You never seem to really *find* it. It has no real centre, no hub around which it turns. On the other hand, it's probably this sense of lack, a mute yet forceful absence, that underpins the story's disturbing atmosphere. It's a determinedly opaque, rather mysterious film, not so much a nightmare, more a sort of purgatorial daydream where none of the narrative details, such as Radeck's miserable marriage or Olivia's thwarted passions, seem to account for the unsettling effect. The forward thrust of narrative, never one of Franco's strong suits, is at a virtual standstill, which means that the hardcore sex in the original version – especially the 'bloody banana' scene – earns its place because it *enlivens* the film, rather than detracting from it. We *need* the gynaecological extremity to give the otherwise free-floating unease some point of coalescence.

There is, I have to say, something *very* odd about this film. I've seen it many times, and on each occasion I've been tempted to dismiss it with faint praise. And yet I hesitate to write it off. It stays in my mind for days. It's as if there's a hidden door in the architecture of the film, just at the edge of your vision, with a secret room beyond, the haunted air of which keeps drifting through your mind as you watch. *The Hot Nights of Linda* is a problematic effort which is nonetheless a prime carrier for that strange viral life-form we call 'the Franco magic'. At first glance it's just a film about faintly pervy goings-on in a beach house run by a taciturn patriarch,

yet there's a rattle of pure Franco madness creeping between the walls. I would entirely understand a sceptic's doubts after reading all these caveats, but for those who have already developed a taste for the hard stuff, the cracked vessel of *The Hot Nights of Linda* contains a neat dose of that inimitable Franco liquor.

**Cast and crew:** Pierre Taylou made his first appearances for Franco in *The Hot Nights of Linda*, *Tender and Perverse Emanuelle* and *Kiss Me Killer* before going on to significant roles in *Exorcism* (1974) and *Midnight Party* (1975). A regular actor for Eurociné, he's a habitué of the "insert shoot", popping up in the rarely seen 'garden orgy' added to *Virgin among the Living Dead*, and in the extra scenes for *Cecilia*, a Eurociné variant of Franco's *Aberraciones de una mujer casada* (1980). He's also in a scene cut into *Countess Perverse* for one of its variant re-issues as *Les Croqueuses*. Likeable though he is, one has to say he's not the most naturalistic performer. His scenes in *The Hot Nights of Linda* are especially awkward. Even when he's not playing an idiot, he has an unfortunate tendency to react to his fellow performers a couple of beats too late, giving him a comical air of struggling to keep up. An unusual highlight in *The Hot Nights of Linda* sees him thrashed with a cane across his nude back and buttocks by Paul Müller as the enraged Radeck – probably the only eroticised depiction of male-on-male sadism in the entire Franco oeuvre ... Discussing a difficult nude scene in *The Hot Nights of Linda*, Alice Arno had this to say when discussing Franco's directing technique in the magazine *Sex Stars System*: "Yes, it is difficult to play scenes naked. But in fact: no. I think back to Jess who filmed me nude in pretty dramatic scenes and that was fine. With Jess, we talk before the scene ... During the preparation we are both in a corner and he explains exactly what he wants and then it's for me to get by. He knows how to explain what he wants ... I remember a scene where I was crying and I roll naked on a bed: it was not easy but we did it."<sup>2</sup>

**Music:** The title theme is a pretty yet oddly jaundiced number by Belgian easy listening composers Ian Wira and Charles Gordanne (who wrote together as The Pop Concerto Orchestra). It's a pity they didn't score the rest to the same standard, because elsewhere the soundtrack consists of faintly irritating pseudo-Greek toe-tappers. The Italian version, *La felicità nel peccato*, goes its own way with some pornastic cues, including a groovy piece for stylophone that sacrilegiously brightens the film's rather glum spirits.

**Locations:** As the credits play we see Marie-France walk down the Champs-Élysée (where Eurociné had their offices), along the Seine via the Cours Albert 1er, past the Pont des Invalides, across the Pont Alexandre III, and up the Avenue du Maréchal Gallieni towards the Musée L'Armée. The Radeck house is actually a hotel; it can be seen 'playing itself' in *Tender and Perverse Emanuelle*. The mosaic-walled cellar of the Radeck house, identified by Alain Petit as a Parisian location, can also be seen in *Female Vampire* ... The Parisian segment can be dated by reference to the film posters and billboards on the Champs Élysées, namely Gérard Oury's *Les Aventures de Rabbi Jacob* (released in France 18 October 1973), Bertrand Tavernier's *L'Horloger de Saint-Paul* (released in France







Olivia (Romay) joins her half-sister Linda (Verónica Liniers) in bed, leading to a scene played out largely in the viewer's imagination in *But Who Raped Linda?* but which in *Les Nuits brûlantes de Linda* is depicted with gynaecological detail. This is the case in just about every situation in the story: all told there are no less than 33 scenes which are different across the two versions, to a greater or lesser degree. Both contain material not present in the other, and in some cases the divergent information is crucial to an understanding of the film! It is in fact seriously hard to follow the story of either version without reference to the other...



In a scene from *But Who Raped Linda?* which does not appear in *Les Nuits brûlantes de Linda*, Olivia seduces Abdul by suggestively eating a banana (the macabre significance of which can only be understood by watching the other version). Note that this scene makes no sense at all, coming as it does immediately after Abdul has been knocked unconscious by housebreaking detective Bigotini and his sidekick Catherine Laferrière. Abdul makes no mention of the assault and shows no ill-effects! However, considering that the two investigators broke in, snooped around, and then left (off-camera) without achieving a thing, it's debatable which scene is the most absurd.



The sorry fate of Abdul is scattered across two versions of the film. *Les Nuits brûlantes de Linda* features him having (hardcore) sex with Olivia, but when Radeck intervenes and drags him to the cellar it's the 'soft' version, *But Who Raped Linda?*, which shows him being savagely whipped. In order to get the most from his subsequent mistreatment by Marie-France and Olivia, one must flip back to *Les Nuits brûlantes de Linda*, which includes a scene where Marie-France mounts him whilst he's trussed to the wall, and a memorable exchange with Olivia, in which she caresses his welted flesh and gloats, "You know I find you attractive? Is this your blood? I like to see your blood. It excites me."

16 January 1974), and *Papillon* (which opened in Paris 6 February 1974). This (plus the wet weather and leafless trees) indicates a February or March shoot for Arno's Parisian scenes (which ties in neatly with the extra material Franco shot with her for *Female Vampire*). The rest of the film was shot in Alicante, at a Greek-style 'hotel complex' which Franco admired.

**UK release:** A photo-spread for the film appeared in the UK magazine *Continental Film Review* in October 1975, under the truncated title *Who Raped Linda?* However, neither this version nor the English-language export version *Erotic Dreams* were ever submitted to the BBFC. Ralf Gregan's West German porno film *Bed Career* (1972), on the other hand, was submitted as *Erotic Dreams* by the London theatre chain Cinecenta, and was given a UK 'X' certificate on 18 September 1974. (Note: Lasse Braun's hardcore *Wet Dreams* was also known as *Erotic Dreams*. However, it was rejected outright by the BBFC in December 1974).

**Connections:** Echoes, premonitions and circularity are frequent motifs in Franco. *Female Vampire*, for instance, returns the Countess Irina to the beginning of the story to suffer her insatiable appetites forever. Ritualistic conjurations of inescapable fate bestow even Franco's secular stories with a vaguely supernatural aura, within which his characters rotate like mechanised mannequins. Here there's a touch of *The Twilight Zone* as Marie-France gets a second chance of happiness by changing her mind and avoiding the Radeck house entirely. In similar fashion, Franco lightened the mood of *Countess Perverse* when he added new material for the 'sexier' version *Les Croqueuses*, allowing Lina Romay's character to escape a miserable fate ... In *Les Gloutonnes*, Alice Arno reads a book that turns out to be the story we're watching. The same situation is echoed here, although the book we see at the end is *not* the one she was reading at the beginning: in the opening scene it was *Le Grappin*, a police thriller by Alain Page, writer of the 1969 Jacques Deray thriller *La Piscine*; in the final scene the book has morphed into "Mais qui donc a violé Linda?" by a certain David Khunne (actually a copy of the Spanish Uniespaña film production catalogue with a paper slip wrapped around it!) ... As in *Eugenie*, a character called Radeck is played by Paul Müller ... Important characters called Linda had already featured in *Vampyros Lesbos* and *Sinner: the Secret Diary of a Nymphomaniac* but here the name makes its first appearance in the title of a Franco film, to be followed a few years later by the American release of *Lorna... the Exorcist*, which played a few grindhouse dates as *Linda* (or *Luscious Linda*), and the 1980 sex drama *Linda* (aka *The Story of Linda*) ... The inserts of Bigotini's private investigator and Laferrière's sexy female assistant recall Andrés Monales and Soledad Miranda spying on the action in *Nightmares Come at Night* ...

**Other versions:** *The Hot Nights of Linda* is a hydra-headed puzzle for the Franco researcher. The best starting point to get a grip on the film's history is a revealing interview on the Severin Blu-ray release, in which Jess Franco and Lina Romay outline the troubles they experienced in marketing the project. Due in part to short-term

financial difficulties at Eurociné, Franco found himself entering choppy waters in 1974, with conflicting commercial demands tossing him this way and that (see also *Exorcism*). Numerous changes of emphasis were demanded by producer Marius Lesoeur, switching the content from near-hardcore to softcore drama to hardcore porn and all points in between (in the course of the Blu-ray interview, Franco claims, *probably* in jest, that there were ten versions altogether!). The film was originally announced, to the magazine *Sex Stars System*, as 'Caresses de chattes' (roughly, 'Stroking the Pussy'), but the title was immediately refused by the French censor. According to Franco it was first screened instead as *Les Nuits brûlantes de Linda*, in a 'hard softcore' version shown by the Lesoeurs at a film market "in Holland or somewhere".<sup>3</sup> The film was, to use Franco's description, essentially "nasty" in tone, and at this stage, according to Romay, was solely about the Radeck household, with no wraparound or cutaway elements. (Note: such a version has yet to turn up on video, DVD or Blu-ray.) Worried that the film was too 'strong' for general release, Marius Lesoeur convinced Jess to create another, softer version (title unknown). The erotic scenes were trimmed, and additional wraparound scenes with Alice Arno were shot, reconfiguring the tale as merely her character's bad dream: bearing in mind the involvement of Italian co-producers Parva Cinematografica, the move was also no doubt intended to exploit Arno's popularity at the Italian box-office.<sup>4</sup> (Note: this version too has yet to surface on video, DVD or Blu-ray). Still unsatisfied, Lesoeur demanded yet another version, hence a comic sub-plot was filmed, involving a private investigator and his photographer, played by Bigotini and Catherine Laferrière. The resulting variant, *Mais qui donc a violé Linda?*, is one of two versions we can see today; it forms the basis for the Italian release (*La felicità nel peccato*), and the English-language cut (*But Who Raped Linda?*), the latter of which can be found on 'disc one' of the Severin Blu-ray set. The comedy footage means that Bigotini appears as two completely different characters (Marie-France's employment agent, and the private eye in the comedy sub-plot), but never mind, all can be explained – he's one person in the dream, another in reality! In *La felicità nel peccato* the dialogue was dubbed into Italian, of course, and a few music cues were changed, but the story edit remained the same as *Mais qui donc a violé Linda?*. Curiously, some time later, the Italian print was redubbed with the English track recorded for *But Who Raped Linda?* to create a *second* English-language export variant, *Erotic Dreams*; structurally this is *But Who Raped Linda?* in all but name, except that it includes, bizarrely, the Italian 'secondo tempo' interval card! (One surmises that this version was made in Italy without recourse to the French elements; perhaps it was produced without Eurociné's knowledge?)

And still we're not finished with this tale! Fishing for more success in the porno market, Eurociné performed a volte face and asked Franco for another variant, *stronger* this time. With phenomenal fortitude Franco agreed, and shot new hardcore sex scenes featuring Lina and two unidentified performers, male and

female. The resulting 'hard' version – featuring Romay fellating an erect penis and receiving it vaginally, plus lots more cunnilingus and masturbation – re-used the earlier title *Les Nuits brûlantes de Linda*, saw theatrical and video release in France, and today can be found (in a shonky video-age transfer) on the triple-disc Severin Blu-ray. If you're willing to cope with some really poor image quality it's well worth the effort to watch this cut, as it's probably the closest in spirit to the first (unavailable) version, dispensing with comedy to concentrate on explicit erotica soaked in morbidity – and it's the only way to see the infamous 'bloody banana sequence' which, judging by the grading of the colour photography, may well have been part of the original version. Which is funny, because it means that the question of 'Who Raped Linda?' is only conclusively answered in a version that doesn't ask! How very Jess Franco ... The Spanish video box calls the film *Habitacion prohibida*, but features the English-language title *But Who Raped Linda?* onscreen ... Eurociné's website lists the film as *Savage Girls* with poster art for yet another retitling, *Les Petites Filles sauvages*. It also lists different character names: Radeck becomes Vanbeck, Marie-France becomes Emmanuelle, Olivia becomes Lucia, Linda becomes Eugenia, and Abdul becomes Igor ... Note: a Greek video release by 'Finos Films' called *Savage Girls* is a non-Franco WIP film...

## TENDER AND PERVERSE EMANUELLE

France & Belgium 1973/4

French visa number: 47276

*Original theatrical title in country of origin*

**Des Frissons sur la peau** (BEL theatrical) *Shivers on the Skin*

**Des Frissons sous la peau** (FR) *Shivers under the Skin*

*Alternative titles*

**Tender and Pervers Emanuelle** (onscreen Eng-lang export title)

**Tendre et perverse Emmanuelle** (FR theatrical re-titling)

**Sicarius** (IT theatrical - see 'Other versions')

**Tierna y perversa Emmanuelle** (MEX theatrical)

**French Emmanuelle** (UK video)

**El último escalofrío** (SP video) *The Last Shudder*

**Tender and Perverse Emmanuelle** (NL video cover)

**Tender of Perverse Emmanuelle** (NL video spine mis-titling)

**Derniers frissons** (FR video) *The Last Shivers*

**Perverse Emanuelle** (GER DVD)

**Perverse Emmanuelle** (GER alt. DVD - different spelling)

**Le Chemin solitaire** (shooting title) *The Lonely Path*

**Dernière Extase** (reported in *Sex Stars System*) *Last Ecstasy*

**Homicidio en un camino solitario** (title first announced by Franco in 1972) *Murder on a Lonely Path*

*Unconfirmed titles*

**No Kiss for Barbara**

**The Last Thrill**

**Last Thrills** [Eurociné website]

**Sérenade à Barbara** [see 'Other versions']

*Production companies*

**Eurociné** (Paris)

**Général Films** (Brussels)

**Brux International Films** (Brussels) [later prints]

*Theatrical distributors*

**Eurociné** (Paris)

\*hardcore version **Les Films du Palais Royal** (Paris)

\***Universum** (Berlin)

\*information from *Monster Bis Magazine*.

*Timeline*

Initial shooting	Dec 1973-January	1974
Further shooting	circa July	1974
French visa issued ( <i>Des Frissons...</i> )	26 September	1977
Italy (Lucca, Tuscany)	14 March	1978
France	27 June	1979

*Theatrical running time*

France (*Des Frissons sur la peau*) 77m

*Cast:* **Jack Taylor** (Dr. Michael 'Michel' Dreville). **Alice Arno** (Yvonne, hotel manager). **Norma Kastel** (Emmanuelle Douglas, also called 'Barbara', Gordon's wife). **Lina Romay** (Greta Douglas, Gordon's sister). **Roger Germanes** (fair-haired cop with Bigotini). **Antoine Fontaine** (the Douglas's manservant). **Pierre Taylou** (Bishmah, a hippie). **Monique Van Linden** (Miss Benson, Emmanuelle's secretary). **Bigotini** [as 'Richard Kennedy'] (Inspector Siodmak's assistant). **Alberto Dalbés** (Gordon Douglas). *uncredited:* **Dan Van Husen** (Inspector Siodmak). **Antonio Mayans** (Ray Trescary). **Ramón Ardid** (police office clerk/Mathias, the Douglas' gardener [*two roles*]). **Véronica Llimera** (Lola, Yvonne's employee). **Susana Taber** (the fake Emmanuelle).

*Credits:* director: **Jess Franco**. screenplay: **Henri Bral de Boitselier** [as 'Henry Brasle de Bousselier']. adaptation: **David Khunne**, **A. L. Mariaux**. director of photography: **Gérard Brissaud** / **Stephen Rosenfeld**, **Alain Hardy** [prints vary]. editor: **Josianne Pierette Belair** [as 'Josiane Gibert'] / **Claude Gros**. music by **Daniel White**. producers: **Jean Quérut**, **Daniel Lesoeur**. production manager: **Richard Deconnink**. continuity: **Ilena Kunesova**. assistant editor: **Joël Stevens**.



**Note:** Different prints credit different directors: *Derniers Frissons* credits 'Peter Kerr', *Tenders and Pervers* *Emanuelle* credits 'J.P. Johnson'. A version screened on French TV as *Des Frissons sur la peau* states 'un film de Jess Franco', however the credits appear to have been re-shot.

**Synopsis:** Jealous husband Gordon Douglas feels sure that his wife, the famous concert pianist *Emanuelle* Douglas, is sleeping around. What's more, he's convinced that a sonata she has composed, which she plays constantly, was written for a previous lover. Gordon visits Dr. Michael Dreville, an old friend, and tells him that he believes *Emanuelle* is losing her mind. Michael agrees to come to the Douglas residence and examine her. The two men wait but *Emanuelle* does not show up. The next morning her body is discovered in a car wreck on an isolated beach. When Michael inadvertently plays the piano melody *Emanuelle* wrote, their prior relationship with Michael comes to light. Gordon attacks Michael in jealous fury. That night, the owner of a small hotel, where *Emanuelle* and Michael used to meet before *Emanuelle* married Gordon, is garrotted with a loop of wire. Unbeknownst to Gordon, his sister Greta is now Michael's lover, and she'd also had a fling with *Emanuelle*. Greta and Michael talk to Miss Benson, *Emanuelle*'s secretary, who tells them that Gordon had made his wife desperately unhappy with his oppressive jealousy. Miss Benson confirms that it drove *Emanuelle* into the arms of many other men. Michael is picked up by Inspector Siodmak, questioned about his relationship with the deceased, and arrested on suspicion of murder. Greta continues to investigate *Emanuelle*'s disappearance with help from a hippy friend Bishmah, who also had a brief affair with *Emanuelle*. They head for Yvonne's bar, where *Emanuelle* used to go to pick up men, including a local criminal, Ray Trescary. Mathias, the Douglas's retarded gardener, tells Greta that on the day *Emanuelle* disappeared he saw her with Trescary. Bishmah tells the police that Trescary was *Emanuelle*'s mistress; as a result they release Michael, ordering him not to get involved in the case any further. Michael ignores them and goes to Yvonne's bar to ask for her help. Before they can decide what to do, the police arrive. Yvonne hides Michael round the back of the bar while she distracts the police, but whilst hiding there he's held at gunpoint by Trescary, who claims to have loved *Emanuelle* and says he's not her killer. The two men get into a fight. Yvonne reappears and shoots Trescary but he shoots her back. Both of them die, but not before Yvonne implicates Trescary, saying that he was extorting money by blackmail and probably killed *Emanuelle* when she refused to pay up. The police accept her explanation and believe the case is solved. Gordon apologises to Michael for suspecting him, and Michael returns home. Once everyone has left, Gordon descends to a secret cellar where he has *Emanuelle* under lock and key. He explains to her how he had taken a young woman resembling *Emanuelle* to a hotel, murdered her, dressed her in *Emanuelle*'s clothes, and driven her off a cliff in *Emanuelle*'s car, having first mutilated her face to make identification impossible. He now has *Emanuelle* all to himself, and intends to punish her at his leisure for all the pain she put him through. But he reckons without Greta, who has crept down to the cellar and has a final twist to add to the tale...

**Review:** This woozily unfocussed tale of jealousy and betrayal resembles the films Umberto Lenzi was making in Italy in the late 1960s with Hollywood émigré Carroll Baker (*Orgasmo*; *Paranoia*; *Knife of Ice*). It's a pity Franco couldn't afford to hire a genuine talent like Baker, because the star of *Tender and Perverse* *Emanuelle*, Norma Kastel, is the least expressive leading lady he'd worked with to this point. Popping up out of nowhere in the mid 1970s, she did nine films in four years (including a minor role as a reanimated corpse in Leon Klimovsky's *Vengeance of the Zombies* and a featured role as the terrorised Governess in Pedro Luis Ramirez's *El colegio de la muerte*), before disappearing just as suddenly. She's simply miscast here, being much too spinsterish in appearance to make the erotic fixations of her husband, his best friend, his sister, and sundry secondary characters believable. Lina Romay is deliciously selfish and salacious in a supporting role, sleeping with *Emanuelle* in order to steal her lover, and Dalbés does all right with the part of the paranoid cuckold, but the film really needs a sympathetic female lead; Kastel just isn't right for the part.

As so often in Franco, for the pleasures of the film we must turn to the mood. "She lives detached from the world, lost in some daydream," says *Emanuelle*'s husband (echoing Gavin Elster's description of his wife Madeleine in Hitchcock's *Vértigo*), and it's precisely this dreamy detachment that the film is so good at portraying. The photography is saturated with excess sunlight, speckled and indistinct, dappled with refractions, sometimes purposely out of focus. As a romantic thriller *Tender and Perverse* *Emanuelle* is a shade too torpid to excite, but at least the feeling attributed to the heroine, a sensation of being trapped behind glass while life passes by, is well-conveyed. The film drips with a kind of sleepy Continental languor, and as a consequence it's not without merit. A meandering time-frame also helps to set one's mind adrift; flashbacks to *Emanuelle*'s troubled past, as well as Michael and Greta's memories of the heroine, are strewn so casually into the storyline that you could easily miss the occasional explanatory voice-over (a fleeting "That's how it all started...", for instance).

The sketchily elaborated time-frame and tenuous narrative connections tell their own story: bear in mind that this was a fragmented production, chopped together from at least two, possibly three different shoots. Franco actually casts Ramón Ardid twice; the first time in a blink and you'll miss him role as a secretarial gopher to the police, and later, more substantially, as *Emanuelle*'s simple-minded gardener Mathias, whom Greta seduces in order to extract information. (Notice that as Greta is played by Lina Romay we're seeing her seduce her own real-life husband here, a scenario also served up in the following year's *Célestine, An All Round Maid*.) There are some tried-and-true pleasures for lovers of Eurotrash melodrama (obsessive love, a troubled heroine, seedy affairs in expensive locations) but perhaps the reason the film has failed to gain much traction with fans is that it strays too close to that ever-present line in Franco's work between elegance and lethargy. With a preponderance of characters standing around, sipping drinks and

discussing the plot, this is a hazy Mogodon giallo for the dedicated Francophile only.

**Cast and Crew:** The project was first announced with Yul Brynner and Raquel Welch in the leads, after which one as to say that Alberto Dalbés and Norma Kastel struggle to live up to expectations!

**Music:** “Your perverted passion for music has stood between us from the day we first met.” If you don’t like the treacly Michel Legrand stylings of Daniel White’s main theme for piano and strings you’ll be screaming for mercy by the end. It’s poured all over the film like a rich sauce concealing a meagre portion of meat. “That melody again - it’s becoming an obsession,” Dalbés says to his wife in the opening scene, “Who did you write it for?” (‘And what did they ever do to hurt you?’ he might have added.) Elsewhere, a spacey ‘haunted ballroom’ piece for echoed piano makes its debut; it will reappear several times in Franco’s output for Golden Films in the early-to-mid-1980s.

**Locations:** Alicante; Calpe; Villajoyosa. The tower-shaped hotel where Dreville stays resembles La Torre de Cabo Roig, as seen in *Sadisterotica*, but in fact it’s a different location.

**Connections:** Pieces of music that obsess characters or provide clues to criminal activities are frequent in Franco: see *La muerte silba un blues*, *Kiss Me Monster*, *Kiss Me Killer*, *La noche de los sexos abiertos* and *Sangre en mis zapatos* ... “We live in an isolated house, south of Manacoa,” says Gordon Douglas, namechecking Franco’s recently minted production company ... A police inspector called Siodmak echoes the name of one of Franco’s favourite directors, Robert Siodmak (*The Spiral Staircase*; *Criss Cross*; *The Suspect*) ... The apparent fate of Emanuelle, smashed to death in a coastal motor accident, must surely have stemmed from Franco’s continued trauma after the death of Soledad Miranda; likewise the story’s major twist, in which she’s actually still alive, kept imprisoned in the basement by her insanely jealous husband. Casting an older woman may have been an attempt to suppress the intensity of his feelings, but the sombre mood enveloping the film must have had its roots in Franco’s powerful sense of loss.

**Other versions:** Franco’s original cut was called *Des Frissons sur la peau* (‘Shivers on the Skin’) and like its back-to-back partner *Kiss Me Killer* was very likely begun between late November 1973 and January 1974, on location in Spain, between Orihuela and Alicante. Antonio Mayans, who appeared in *La noche de los asesinos*, *Tender and Perverse Emanuelle* and *Kiss Me Killer*, remembers just one sustained period of filming with Franco at that time; so it seems very likely the two Eurociné productions were shot back to back in December. However, in his scenes with Lina Romay, Ramón Ardid can be seen reading Issue #30 of the magazine *Ciné Télé Revue* (published 25 July 1974), so the earliest this scattershot production could have been finished is August 1974. Even then it appears to have languished unreleased until 1977, by which time the market for drowsy Euro-thrillers was on the wane. Not to be defeated, Eurociné re-dubbed and retitled it *Tender and Perverse Emanuelle*, no doubt impressed by the way Italian sleaze dynamo

Joe D’Amato had co-opted the word ‘Emmanuelle’ for a lucrative series of sex films, beginning with *Emanuelle e Françoise le sorelline* in 1975. (D’Amato cannily mis-spelled ‘Emmanuelle’ with one ‘m’ to avoid lawsuits; Eurociné followed suit, but got a little bit carried away and dropped the last ‘e’ in ‘Perverse’ as well, using the French spelling instead of the English.) *Emmanuelle*, of course, was one of the international success stories of the 1970s, and many a Euro-trash film sought to bask in its sexy afterglow. Franco’s, however, has to be one of the least erotic movies to grab a piece of the action (it’s certainly the only one in which the eponymous sex goddess is a middle-aged concert pianist). *Tender and Perverse Emanuelle* wilts beneath its misplaced moniker but it has to be said that ‘Shivers on the Skin’ was just as meaningless ... The opening credit sequence of *Tender and Perverse Emanuelle* consists of a beautiful backlit shot of Lina Romay and Alice Arno, standing nude in a bedroom doorway, smoking cigarettes and kissing. Arno plays with Romay’s breasts before going down on her. Shot with a deep orange glow, the scene is rendered all the more atmospheric by the incessant plumes of cigarette smoke swathing the shots. Interestingly, the scene is lifted from material shot during the making of *The Hot Nights of Linda*, in which Arno and Romay have a conversation in the doorway of the Radeck house. However, in no currently available version of *The Hot Nights of Linda* does the scene go on to include sexual touching, as it does in *Tender and Perverse Emanuelle*, which suggests that Franco snipped a piece from the already sizzling *Hot Nights* and used it to spice up *Tender and Perverse*, further enhancing the sense that as many as five films around this time were being assembled contemporaneously (*The Hot Nights of Linda*, *Tender and Perverse Emanuelle*, *Kiss Me Killer*, *Female Vampire* and *Les Gloutonnes*).

In a film with only a few brief erotic interludes, the inclusion of a hardcore insert about five minutes from the end comes as a bit of a shock. It occurs during a flashback depicting Alberto Dalbés making out with Emanuelle’s ‘double’ and treats us to a cutaway shot of a female hand masturbating a penis as it sticks out of a pair of trousers. I don’t think anyone would seriously expect the sober and dignified Dalbés to contribute such a moment himself, the erection obviously belongs to someone else, but what’s hard to fathom is why anyone would bother to add the scene in the first place. It’s the only such hardcore moment in an otherwise softer than softcore setting. It seems highly likely that this stray penis is all that survives from a full-on French hardcore version which was then trimmed down again for export! Alain Petit comments, “Originally much more than a sexy cop story, the film had to undergo a lot of revisions before appearing on the X-circuit in Paris ... almost twenty minutes of additional scenes came to replace twenty minutes of intrigue, making the film ‘hard’ and totally incomprehensible.”<sup>21</sup> Sadly this hardcore variant – from Universum, German distributors of Joe D’Amato’s *Emanuelle* films, and Les Films du Palais Royal, who gave us Leroi’s *Lèche-moi partout* (1978) and Bigotini’s *Ces sacrées anglaises* (1977) – is currently impossible to see ... The film was released in Italy in 1977 as *Sicarius* (a Latin word meaning

'assassin' which is also a name for a concealed dagger; fittingly, considering the hidden malice of Emanuelle's husband). A variant title, *Febbre di sesso*, appears to have derived from the Italian poster which reads 'Febbre di sesso nel film Sicarius' ('Sexual fever in the film *Sicarius*'). This poster seems to have confused everyone, as the Italian press listings demonstrate: the film first played in Lucca, Tuscany, listed as *Febbre di sesso*; then in Pinerolo (near Turin) and Domodossola (Piedmont), advertised as *Sicarius*; it became *Febbre di sesso (Sicarius)* for dates in Florence; then reverted to *Febbre di sesso* when it hit Rome!

**Problematica:** Monique Van Linden, make-up artiste on Franco's *Exorcism*, is sometimes credited with playing Emanuelle's secretary Miss Benson, however this remains unconfirmed. The IMDb currently adds the following incorrect cast members: Pierre Quérut; Gilda Arancio. Various sources incorrectly add Carmen Carbonel as Gordon's mother.

## KISS ME KILLER

### Italy & France 1973/4

French visa number: 42484

Italian visa number: 70636

*Original theatrical title in country of origin*

**Embrasse moi** (FR) *Kiss Me*

**La calda bestia** (IT theatrical) *The Hot Beast*

### Alternative titles

**Passeport pour un tueur** (FR video) *Passport for a Killer*

**Last Hold-Up** (FR video)

**Vals por un asesino** (SP video) *Waltz for a Murderer*

**Vals para un asesino** (SP video) *Waltz for a Murderer*

**Aime-moi assassin** (FR theatrical pressbook) *Love Me Killer*

**Tango au clair de lune** (FR theatrical?) *Tango in the Moonlight*

**Sexy Blues** (shooting title [OB and 'Cinema Blue' magazine])

### Unconfirmed titles

**Embrasse-moi... et fais-moi l'amour** [Eurociné book]

*Kiss Me and Make Love to Me*

**Blues au clair de lune** [pre-release title?] *Blues in the Moonlight*

**Valse pour un tueur** [Eurociné book] *Waltz for a Killer*

**Emmanuelle Blonde** [see 'Other versions']

**Blonde Emmanuelle** ['Other versions']

### Production company

**Eurociné** (Paris)

Italian producer not confirmed

### Theatrical distributors

**Eurociné** (Paris)

**MA. GI. Cinematografica** (Rome)

### Timeline

Initial shooting	December	1973
Further shooting	March	1974
French visa issued ( <i>Embrasse moi</i> )	09 May	1977
Italian visa number issued	12 August	1977
Italy (Florence)	11 November	1977
France	14 December	1978

### Theatrical running time

France (as *Embrasse moi*) 98m

**Cast:** **Alice Arno** (Lida Radeck). **Lina Romay** (Moiray Ray, a stripper). **Olivier Mathot** (Moroni, owner of the Flamingo Club). **Giuseppe Mattei** [as 'James Harris'] (Carlo, Moroni's henchman). **Gilda Arancio** (blonde stripper at Flamingo Club). **Ricardo Vázquez Sesé** [as 'Richard Kendall'] (Paul Radeck, aka 'Fougère'). **Angelo Bassi** (Sergeant Peck, Fenton's assistant). **Catherine Laferrière** (Rosa, a moll). **Paul Müller** (Inspector Fenton of Criminapol). *uncredited:* **Dan Van Husen** (Jules). **Jacques Marboeuf** (pianist). **Alberto Dalbés** (Freddy Carter). **Pierre Taylou** (Pépé, Kookooma's friend). **Jess Franco** (Kookooma, aka 'Marcel'). **Antonio Mayans** (Mario Camacho, young gang member). **Bigotini** (gang member on dock with moustache). **Giok Swan Heinze-Thung** [aka 'Swan Heinze'] (woman congratulating Carter).

**Credits:** director: **Jess Franco** [as 'Roland Marcegnac']. screenplay: **David Khunne**, **Roland Marcegnac**, **Gianfranco Riccioni** [as 'Rocioni']. director of photography: **Gérard Brissaud**. music by **Daniel White**. producer: **Daniel Lesoeur**. production manager: **Marius Lesoeur**. production co-ordinator: **Michel Breuil**. assistant directors: **Gianni Martucci** [as 'M. Martucci'], **Guy Pezzetta**. continuity: **Ilona Kunesova**. camera operator: **Etienne Rosenfeld**. *uncredited:* sound: **Pierre Goumy**. filmed in 'scope'. colour: **Eastmancolor**.

**Synopsis:** *Lo Pagán, a port in Southern Spain, 1973. A gang of criminals – Paul Fougère, Moroni, Jules, Carlo, and Freddy Carter – plan to pick up a consignment of drugs at the harbour. However, during the getaway Fougère shoots Carter, and at the rendezvous Moroni stabs Jules. Fougère tells Freddy's wife Lida that it was the police who killed Freddy ... 4th March 1975: Fougère now lives under the alias of Paul Radeck in a luxury seaside villa in the South of France. Lida – who hangs out with Pépé, a musician, Rosa, Pépé's partner, and Kookooma, 'a real guru' – tells Paul that while she was at The Flamingo Club the night before she heard the band play a jazz-blues song written for her by Freddy. Someone had apparently requested the number specifically for*



her. Moira Ray, a stripper, turns out to be the person who requested the song. She's sexually involved with ex-gang member Carlo, now manager of the Flamingo Club, and also with Moroni, who is the club's owner. Moroni has also remained Fougère/Radeck's right-hand man. Meanwhile Freddy Carter – who did not in fact die from Fougère's gunshot – arrives in town. At the harbour he's approached by three hoodlums, led by Mario Camacho. They attempt to beat him up but Freddy gets the better of them. That night, an unseen assailant shoots the pianist who played the jazz number requested by Moira. At the Flamingo Club, Fougère arranges to meet Moira, and takes her back to his house, where she ends up making love with Lida. Camacho hooks up with Carter, who grills him for information about 'Radeck'. Fougère receives a letter from Carter, demanding a rendezvous. Carter has recently made the acquaintance of Moira and the two have sex together. Afterwards, Moira writes a report to the Spanish police; she's been sent undercover to discover the truth about Fougère and Carter. That night, Carter breaks into Fougère's house and plays the record he wrote for Lida at full blast before quickly leaving the way he came. Moroni goes to the police on Fougère's behalf, demanding an investigation into the mystery. Carter takes an opportunity to visit Lida and it transpires they have been plotting together. Carter is followed by Moroni, and after a car chase and a violent struggle Carter shoots him dead. Badly beaten, Carter wakes the next day to find that Camacho's friend found him and resuscitated him. Carter is allowed to recuperate at Camacho's house, looked after by Rosa. After trying to question Moira, then brutally whipping her with a belt when she refuses to divulge who she's working for, Fougère tells his wife that he's tempted to go on the run; he's afraid to go to the rendezvous with Carter. He admits that he was the one who shot Carter, to protect his criminal interests. Lida persuades him to go through with the meeting, saying that she no longer has feelings for her ex-husband. At the arranged meeting point, an old mill, Fougère is confronted by Carter, along with Inspector Fenton and Sergeant Peck. Carter reveals that he now works for Interpol, and vital information has been given to them by Lida. She spits that she despises Fougère for what he did to her husband. Fougère shoots Peck and Lida and runs away, with Fenton and Carter in pursuit. On the beach, Fougère is held at gunpoint by a distraught and vengeful Moira, who shoots him dead.

**Production notes:** There is reason to wonder whether Italian funding was clandestinely involved for *Kiss Me Killer*, as there are two Italian actors present in small roles (Giuseppe Mattei aka 'James Harris' and Angelo Bassi) and one of the few countries to release the film theatrically was Italy, where it played under the title *La calda bestia* ('The Hot Beast'). Spanish in-production sources published in June 1974 refer to the authorisation of a 'policíaca' (what the Italians would call a 'poliziotto') film entitled *Sexy Blues*, made for former production manager Enrique Uviedo Herrera's company Trans Overseas Pictures of Madrid and directed by former prolific make-up artist Ricardo Vázquez Sesé, who'd been assistant director and actor in Franco's *La noche de los asesinos*. The cast for *Sexy Blues* was given as Alice Arno, Alberto Dalbés, and Vázquez acting under his 'Richard Kendall' pseudonym. It seems

reasonable to assume that the film got into difficulties, Franco stepped in, and the useable footage was incorporated into *Kiss Me Killer*. Around the same time, Vázquez produced and co-starred in two films directed by Pedro Luis Ramírez: *El pez de los ojos de oro* (1974) with a Franco-like cast including Wal Davis, Ada Tauler, Norma Kastel and Montserrat Prous, and *El colegio de la muerte* (1975), also co-starring Kastel.

**Review:** "If there's one thing I hate more than anything else it's to be bored to tears," says Lina Romy, playing Moira, a stripper in this colour remake of Franco's 1962 film *La muerte silba un blues*. I know just how she feels: *Kiss Me Killer* highlights Franco's shortcomings in sharp relief, and seriously outstays its welcome at an exhausting 96 minutes. Way too disjointed and poorly explained, and very sluggishly paced, it relies heavily upon deferred plot information which the audience may easily miss as their eyes glaze over. By the time we understand the key characters and their relationship to criminal cohort Freddy Carter, whose apparent death in the first five minutes sets the story in motion, it's vanishingly hard to care.

Any sympathetic consideration of *Kiss Me Killer* is bound to be hamstrung, at least at the time of writing this book, by the terrible quality of the only available English-language version, an atrociously dubbed, ugly-looking video transfer from the early 1980s. However, while this unlucky handicap must be acknowledged, the film suffers from two more intrinsic failings. Firstly, Franco is *not* a master of suspense, which is a serious problem in a thriller like this where the gradual release of information requires a tight hold on narrative tension; audiences should be champing at the bit for missing pieces of the puzzle. Franco, however, scarcely seems to care about pacing – nowhere in *Kiss Me Killer* is there any sense of acceleration. Events merely succeed one another, like a slide show set at half speed. Secondly, Franco is perennially disinclined to offer graphic violence, even when the subject seems to cry out for it. *Kiss Me Killer* is an exploitation flick with barely a trickle of the 'red red vino', made at a time when Italian directors like Fernando Di Leo and Umberto Lenzi were crafting wonderfully arrogant crime thrillers, zealous arias of blood and bullets with energy to burn. *Kiss Me Killer* juggles a plethora of hoods, cops, thugs and crime lords, but doesn't seem to know what to do with them. It needs garish shootings and savage beatings, moments of cruelty, or baroque set-pieces like the 'horse-head in the bed' in *The Godfather*. Instead there's just a desultory trickle of blood when a minor character is shot, and lots and lots of talk.

If talk is what's on offer, then surely we need to understand the moral outlook of the characters. Yet Franco smothers the story with a blanket of banality and cynicism. Characters connive and double-cross to no emotional effect. Even Fougère's betrayal by his wife Lida lacks passion. Scriptwise, the film is humourless, inert, the dialogue just audible print. The climactic scene between the villain, his nemesis and the authorities does at least take place at an interesting location, the winding house of a dam in

which a giant mechanism turns. The cogs and fan-belts suggest all sorts of Wellesian camera fun, but the production coffers are bare and Franco is in too much of a hurry, rushing past the visual opportunities with barely a flicker of interest.

Of course there are mitigating factors. Lack of money is obviously the main reason the film fails to excite; action sequences are costly, time-consuming, they require multiple camera set-ups and careful editing. But even so, *Kiss Me Killer* is simply inept. Scenes like the double-cross drug deal at the beginning of the film are not so very far removed from the efforts of American no-hoper Al Adamson. It's hard to imagine how Franco could have succeeded, given the crippling financial constraints, but in the final analysis that's not the audience's concern. To put it crudely, there's simply too much gassing and not enough kick-assing.

As mentioned, the film plays particularly badly in its English dub. The uninflected voice performances are astoundingly lazy, thwarting the efforts of the onscreen cast. For instance Antonio Mayans, playing a handsome young hoodlum, is dubbed with a voice like a retired Army Colonel reading cue-cards at an amateur dramatics society. Alberto Dalbés, as Freddy Carter, is given crucial exposition at the climax, but his lines are dubbed with all the passionate intensity of a bored script prompter. There's also a crippling lack of foley sound, with a fully clothed 'sex romp' between Lina Romay and Olivier Mathot left to unspool for a minute and a half in near silence. When sex, horror and surreal delirium are stripped away like this, when the drug of pure sensation is absent, what remains of Franco's cinema can seem dismayingly negligible. In *Kiss Me Killer* there are dispiriting stretches where one could be forgiven for wondering if, say, Eurociné's Pierre Chevalier had taken over the project (which makes the theory that it was begun by a different director very tempting to embrace). After numerous viewings I still don't understand what's going on between Freddy Carter and the gang of seafront hoods led by Antonio Mayans: despite using the 'Manacoa' password it appears they don't know him. Instead they try to mug him, but he thrashes them singlehanded. The next thing we know they've become his best friends, helping him to investigate Radeck! There's also one of Franco's most outrageous lapses of continuity when Freddy Carter breaks into Radeck's house and puts the record of 'Blues Tejado' on the turntable. It's meant to be the middle of the night, and indeed it is pitch black when Freddy sneaks in, but when Radeck and his house guests run downstairs to see what's happening, daylight is streaming through the windows! This, despite Pierre Tylou complaining, "*It's madness playing games at this time of the night!*" The only scene that really cooks is a lesbian encounter between Alice Arno and Lina Romay, where the chemistry between the actors conveys genuine arousal. For the rest of this monumentally tedious effort, Franco's talent is on vacation.

**Franco on screen:** Compensating a tad for the failings of *Kiss Me Killer*, Franco turns up in one of his daffiest roles, playing Kookooma, a self-styled 'guru' who wanders through the film

offering portents of doom before dropping his act to reveal the charlatan beneath. Always willing to take on parts that cast him in a ridiculous light, Franco really earns his spurs as an ironist here: if only the rest of the film had the same anarchic silliness!

**Cast and crew:** Ricardo Vázquez Sesé, the middle-aged star of *Kiss Me Killer*, goes unnamed in the credits, nor is he credited on promotional artwork. Instead, top of the cast list honours go to secondary performer, and Eurociné shareholder, Olivier Mathot ... Angelo Bassi, who plays Sergeant Peck, assistant to Paul Müller's Inspector Fenton, was credited in the contemporaneous *Hot Nights of Linda* although he did not appear in that film.

**Music:** *Kiss Me Killer* labours for breath beneath an uncharacteristically dreary Daniel White score, based around a jazz-blues for bleary-eyed trombone that has all the vivacity of a damp pillow. It's not only enervating, it's hopelessly anachronistic for a film of the seventies, and it's all the more frustrating when one remembers the excellent psychedelic scores, assembled for Franco by Gérard Kikoïne on roughly contemporary films like *How to Seduce a Virgin*, *Countess Perverse* and *Sinner: the Secret Diary of a Nymphomaniac*. Perhaps Franco was rebelling against contemporary scoring? Both *Kiss Me Killer* and *Tender and Perverse Emmanuelle* utilise musical themes by Daniel White that seem to drift in from another age; more 1953 than 1973. And speaking of *Tender and Perverse Emmanuelle*, its florid piano theme turns up again here.

**Locations:** The film was shot in Spain, in Lo Pagán and El Algar. These Murcian towns are at either end of a large coastal bay separated from the Mediterranean by a spit of land called La Manga del Mar Menor (literally "The Sandbar of the Minor Sea"). Other scenes were filmed in Alicante and Calpe, with the Peñon de Ifach rock visible in some shots (see locations for *Tender and Perverse Emmanuelle*). The office where Inspector Fenton (Paul Müller) and Sergeant Peck (Angelo Bassi) question Radeck's right-hand man Moroni (Olivier Mathot) is the Eurociné production office; it can also be seen in the following year's *Exorcism*. The room in which the pianist (Jacques Marboeuf) complains to Moira (Romay) about her request to play Freddy's song also appears as Alice Arno's Paris bedroom in *The Hot Nights of Linda*.

**Connections:** As noted, this is a remake of Franco's 1962 film *La muerte silba un blues*, substituting Alberto Dalbés for Conrado San Martín, Ricardo Vázquez Sesé for Georges Rollin, and Alice Arno for Perla Cristal ... The Flamingo Club makes yet another appearance in a Franco script, as does the ever-sinister name 'Radeck' ... Lina Romay is seen reading a paperback by Georges-Jean Annaud called *Le Commandeur et les Spectres*, an espionage story published in 1973 about a woman whose secret criminal past leaves her open to manipulation by the French Secret Service ... Alice Arno's distinctive black negligée, as seen in *The Hot Nights of Linda*, *Tender and Perverse Emmanuelle* and *Les Gloutonnes*, makes yet another appearance, this time worn by Lina Romay during her dressing room scenes with Gilda Arancio and Giuseppe Mattei ... During the drugs pick-up at the docks, one of the gang announces,





"The password is 'The sun shines in Manacoa'", another namecheck for Franco's own film production company. Bearing in mind that both *Tender and Perverse Emmanuelle* and *Kiss Me Killer* feature references to Manacoa (as does the company's debut feature *Un silencio de tumba*), perhaps both films actually started as Manacoa productions, with Franco turning to Eurociné for help when he realised he couldn't finish them on his own? Bearing in mind that he'd already experienced difficulties coaxing two earlier Manacoa productions over the finish line (*Relax Baby* and *El misterio del castillo rojo*), maybe he transferred ownership to Eurociné this time to avoid the same fate befalling two more films?

**Other versions:** The version under review is the one released on Dutch video as *Kiss Me Killer*, which runs 96 minutes. An alternative version, recorded from French television, bears the same onscreen title but removes sixteen minutes of softcore material. The scene in which Ricardo Vázquez goes down on Alice Arno is missing, Lina Romay's shower scene is cut to remove shots of her vagina, the sex scene between Romay and Olivier Mathot is shortened, part of Romay's stage act is cut (losing several minutes of her fellating the statue of David), and Alberto Dalbés's love scene with Arno is much shorter. The film is otherwise identical to the longer version, except that it's in 2.35:1 widescreen and features the far superior French audio track. With the original title being hard to verify (*The Manacoa Files* goes with *Sexy Blues*, *Obsession* opts for *Tango au clair de lune*, the CNC database has *Embrasse moi*, yet none of these have turned up on film prints or poster art), we must settle for *Kiss Me Killer* as the only authenticated option.

The list of alternative titles is long, but we can probably dispense with a few of them. An Italian film poster for something called *Sweet Pornobaby* bears credits that appear to relate to *Kiss Me Killer*, however, Italian press coverage of *Sweet Pornobaby* reveals that the plot doesn't match up: it is in fact another Eurociné Franco movie, the far superior *Shining Sex!* (thanks to Alessio Di Rocco and Roberto Curti for this information). Next, how about *Blonde Emmanuelle*, or *Emmanuelle Blonde*? These sound to me as though they actually belong to the previous Eurociné production *Tender and Perverse Emmanuelle*. Note too that there's an American sex film called *Blonde Emmanuelle* (1978), directed by Stephen Gibson. Some sources list *Kiss Me Killer* (*valse pour un tueur*) as an alternative title, but this is simply a case of the strapline on the French 'Marignan Video' release being erroneously added to the real title ... The Italian theatrical release, *La calda bestia*, was touted in Turin press adverts as offering "90 minuti di Super-Hard-Play" - does this indicate a (missing) hardcore version, or is it simply misleading advertising? (*La calda bestia* should not be confused with another Eurociné project, *La calda bestia di Spielberg* aka Patrice Rhomm's *Helga, la louve de Stilberg*).

**Problematica:** Various sources add the unconfirmed Georges Alexandre as a male dancer at the Flamingo. It's hard to be sure, given the atrocious quality of all available sources, but the woman dancing a topless ballet with him could be Monica Swinn.

## EXORCISM

### France & Belgium 1974

French visa number: 42671

*Original theatrical title in country of origin*

**Exorcisme** (FR)

**Exorcismes et Messes noires** (BEL-French theatrical)

*Exorcisms and Black Masses*

**Exorcisme en Zwarte Missen** (BEL-Dutch theatrical)

**Demoniac** (shorter 'clothed' version)

**Chains and Black Leather** (CAN theatrical)

*Alternative titles*

**Sexorcismes** (FR hardcore theatrical version)

**Le viziose** (IT theatrical) *The Depraved*

*Unconfirmed titles*

**Expériences sexuelles au château des jouisseuses** (BEL alt. theatrical [OB]) *Sexual Experiences at the Château of Sensualists*

**Exorcisme, magie et messes noires** (BEL alt. theatrical [MF])

*Exorcism, Magic and Black Masses*

**O daimonismenos** (Greek video [IMDb])

*Production companies*

**Eurociné** (Paris)

**Cetelci S.A.** (Brussels)

*Theatrical distributors*

**Eurociné** (Paris)

*Timeline*

Approximate shooting date	January-February	1974
Belgium (Brussels)	25 July	1974
French visa issued ( <i>Sexorcisme</i> )	18 December	1974
France ( <i>Sexorcisme</i> )	08 January	1975
Italy (Naples) <i>Le viziose</i>	05 March	1976

*Theatrical running time*

France	87m
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**Cast:** **Lina Romay** (Anna). **Catherine Laferrière** (Marina, the barmaid). **Lynn Monteil** (Rose). **Jess Franco** (Paul Vogel, alias 'Daniel Matisse', real name Paul Rosa). **Pierre Taylou** (Raimond Franval, publisher). **Roger Germanes** (Malou, Tanner's 1st assistant). **Monica Swinn** (Maria-Theresa, the dominatrix). **France Nicolas** (Mrs. Cartier, black mass high priestess). **Sam Maree** (David Cartier). **François Guillaume** (Fred, Marina's boyfriend). **Caroline Rivière** (Gina, dancer at nightclub). **Philippe Lebrun**. **Olivier Mathot** (Inspector Tanner). *uncredited:* **Ramón Ardid** (man watching Gina dancing/hotel receptionist)

[two roles]). **Bigotini** (the Count's manservant). **Claude Sendron** (the Count). **Claude Boisson** [as 'Yul Sanders'] ('Meathead', a petty criminal). **Gaston Meunier** (the pathologist). **Pierre Catesson** (Tanner's 2nd assistant). // *Additional cast - hardcore sequences*: **Marie-Christine Chireix** (woman chained up in attic). **Lina Romay**. **Pierre Taylou**. **David Atta**.

*Credits*: director: **Jess Franco**. screenplay by **David Khune & Henri Bral de Boitselier**. director of photography: **Etienne Rosenfeld**. supervising editor: **Pierre Quérut**. editors: **André Benichou, Jacques Nicolet**. original music by **André Benichou**. executive producer: **Daniel Lesoeur**. production manager: **Marius Lesoeur**. unit manager: **Michel Breuil**. 1st assistant director: **F. Somet**. 2nd assistant director: **Pierre Catesson**. make-up: **Monique van Linden**. dresses: **P. van Leenardt**. continuity: **Ilna Kunesova**. colour: **Eastmancolor**.

**Synopsis**: *Two women, Rose and Anna, take part in a sadomasochistic black magic rite at the chateau of a decadent Count, for an audience of rich sophisticates. The 'rite' climaxes with Rose stabbing Anna, at which point the two of them take a bow, revealing that the Satanic sacrifice was simply an illusion. Anne's day job is as secretary to a publisher of erotica, Raimond Franval. Paul Vogel, a contributor to Franval's magazine 'The Dagger and the Garter', whom Anna finds creepy and disturbing, comes to the office with a new story for publication. Unbeknownst to either of them, Vogel is more than just a writer of erotic horror stories; he's a genuine lunatic, murdering women whom he regards as transgressing God's holy laws. Eavesdropping, he hears Anna and Raimond discussing the next 'black mass' at the Count's chateau. Believing that they're planning a real Satanic rite, he resolves to punish the 'devils' responsible...*

"I am Christian from when I was little. Because of the politics in Spain, everybody must be Christian by law. But I'm not a real big believer. I believe in people. I believe in life. But not especially in Catholics or priests or whatever." - Jess Franco<sup>1</sup>

**Production notes**: This dark and dirty portrait of a Parisian psychopath is a pivotal work in Jess Franco's career. It stands out for its depiction of a very believable monster, all the more unnerving as the actor playing the role is Franco himself.

Dating the production with any precision is vexingly difficult. During his commentary for the 2001 DVD release by Synapse, Franco claimed, "We made *Exorcism* in Paris and had a very nice time, with the autumn weather and fantastic light." He also said that he cast Lynn Monteil *after* admiring her in *Célestine, An All Round Maid*, which was shot in spring 1974: taken together, the two comments suggest autumn 1974 as the shooting period. However, the official Belgian release date, as recently confirmed for me by the Brussels Cinematek, was 25th July 1974! The film must have been shot at least six months earlier. Furthermore, it had to have been finished by the time Franco left Paris for Portugal in April 1974,

because he spent the next four months in Lisbon, Sintra, Cascais and Estoril making *Les Chatouilleuses*, *Le Jouisseur* and *Les Grandes Emmerdeuses*. Monica Swinn, who acted in *Exorcism* and all three of the Portuguese-shot films, told me, "I am not sure, but I believe that *Exorcism* was before Portugal. We were in Portugal just a month after the revolution (25th of april)." Also puzzling is the presence in *Exorcism* of a shot depicting Ramón Ardid working as a hotel concierge; it's an almost exact duplicate of a shot in *Lorna... the Exorcist*, which was shot in April 1974. The location is the same, the camera angle is virtually identical, and Ardid is wearing the same clothes. This leads one to suspect that the two films were 'under construction' at around the same time. Bearing in mind *Female Vampire*, which was pieced together from three separate shoots spread across several months, it's likely that *Exorcism* too was a fragmented production. It seems prudent then to position it early in 1974...

**Review**: *Exorcism* begins with an eight-and-a-half-minute torture sequence, in which a nude woman (Lynn Monteil) subjects a bound female victim (Lina Romay) to a black magic ritual involving flagellation, animal sacrifice, the smearing of blood on naked flesh, and a fatal stabbing – except that the entire spectacle is revealed to be a sado-erotic performance piece, staged in a remote French chateau for an invited audience of jaded sophisticates. This essentially replays, with greater explicitness, the opening scene of Franco's 1968 classic *Succubus*, and contrives to be morbid, obsessive and deeply strange, the mood hovering somewhere between bated-breath suspense and drug-enhanced sexual fantasy, in which the participants move as if underwater. Franco's handheld camera, leaning into the action and lapping up Romay's fear and disgust, communicates a sense of participating in a sick arcane rite; you can almost smell the sweat, the animal blood, the stifling incense. In contrast, the music is sombre and achingly beautiful, mingling church organ, cello and Spanish guitar. This discordant combination of sacred and profane provides the defining harmonic template of the film, mirroring the dissonant mind of the protagonist, Paul Vogel – a pious believer in God, disgusted by sins of the flesh, who writes trashy sex stories for seedy magazines, and fondles the crotches of women before murdering them for their licentious ways.

Like Roman Polanski in *The Tenant* (another morbid Parisian tale in which the director doubles as disturbed protagonist), Franco unflinchingly reveals the most disturbing and pathetic aspects of his lead character, doing so without restraint or self-aggrandisement. There's no ego-protection here: Franco really doesn't care how repellent a character he portrays (his hair is so lank and greasy you doubt it's been washed for months). As if bad grooming were not enough, it transpires that Vogel is a defrocked priest who's escaped from an asylum, currently wanted by the German police for offences against minors! Other characters make disparaging remarks about him, comments that ring sharp with double-edged meaning: after all, Franco is a purveyor of "sadosomachistic melodrama" just like Vogel. "He really is a weirdy!"

says Vogel's trendy kipper-tied publisher, Raimond Franval; "He scares the pants off me," agrees Anna, Raymond's secretary.

So to what extent does Franco himself step under the spotlight here? It's certainly the case that by choosing to play the killer he sends provocative ripples through the film, his personality as a filmmaker conflicting with the character of Vogel to create swirls and eddies of unease. On the one hand we have the similarity between Franco's role as a director of sleazy films and Vogel's role as a writer of sleazy stories ("The storyline's not so hot, but all the details are absolutely authentic and some of them are quite extraordinary"); on the other, there's a resounding clash between the libertarianism of Franco himself and the religious moralism of Vogel. Trying to reconcile these factors induces cognitive tension in the knowing viewer, a queasiness heightened by *Exorcism's* deliberate blending of fantasy and reality. For instance, the office of Vogel's publisher, where Anna and Raimond swap disparaging remarks about him, is in fact the real-life office of production company Eurociné – we can see that the desk is piled high with film magazines (including the January 1973 edition of Italian publication *Cinesex*). The fact that the killer is referred to by three different names ('Paul Vogel', 'Daniel Matisse' and 'Paul Rosa') mirrors Franco's own taste for proliferating pseudonyms (and when the film was re-edited, in 1975 and 1979, the character gained two more, Monsieur Rochelle and Mathis Laforgue). Then there's the startling choice of Caroline Rivière, the director's stepdaughter, to play a go-go dancer at the Beelzebub Club whom Vogel carves up with a knife in one of the film's nastiest scenes. While there is, let's recall, no blood connection between Franco and Rivière, there remains a powerful aura of transgression to the scene, as he manhandles Rivière's bare breasts, trails a crucifix over her vagina, and wipes a bloody knife across her nipples. Considering that the two performers have a quasi-familial connection it's really quite an eye-opener.

Franco says that he only stepped in as Vogel after failing to secure Vincent Price for the role. Leaving aside the bizarre mental image of Price in this project, the remark shows that Franco regarded *Exorcism* as a major undertaking requiring a committed central performance. His assertion that he himself was the best actor available to play the role underlines that he regarded the film as significant, and not to be entrusted to just anyone. (Among Franco's repertory of male actors only Howard Vernon might have played the character well, perhaps as a cross between his resentful doctor in *Sinner* and his nihilistic private eye in *Les Ébranlées*.) With this in mind, we have to ask why a scumbag like Vogel matters so much to Franco that he should take on the part himself. Is the film some kind of 'exorcism' of Franco's Christian childhood? Does he understand, and in some way carry within him, the religious disease of Vogel, who sees women as servants of the Devil designed to pollute men? By playing this character and then 'twisting the knife' does Franco aim to weaken the hold such thoughts might once have had on his imagination? In other words, is the titular 'exorcism' as much personal as fictional?

"Don't be silly, he's perfectly harmless. It's nothing but a literary pose." So says Raimond to Anna. The comment sees Franco poking fun at himself, but it also puts one in mind of *Eugenie* (1970), in which the murderous Radeck described the writer Attila Tanner (played by Franco) as "a harmless maniac," only for Radeck's partner-in-crime Eugenie to respond: "He's a highly refined intelligence, much like us. He understands us." Tanner, let's recall, wanted to study the Radecks (a pair of incestuous sadists on a killing spree) without turning them in. In both films Franco seems to be admitting something of his own character; in *Eugenie* his amoral fascination with murder, in *Exorcism* his upbringing in a heavily Catholic country and its effect on his sexual identity.

Vogel acts out his rage against sinful womankind while at the same time lusting for their flesh and 'fucking' them with a knife. As a portrait of a certain kind of pious sickness, *Exorcism* is bang on the money, juxtaposing the Catholic revilement of female sexuality with the inverted pantomime of Satanic ritual. Both Vogel and the 'Satanists' want to see blood dripping from the mutilated vaginas of tied and bound women; in this they are united. The Satanists, however, are merely bored dilettantes, satisfied with a simulation; hookers strapped to inverted crosses, with stage blood dripping from their pussies. In the topsy-turvy world of Vogel's extreme Christianity, however, there can be no such recourse to illusion. The devil worship at the chateau may be just a sham, but for Vogel, who sneaks in to spy on the action, the symbols carry real weight. Watching the Satanic paraphernalia, he actually winces. For him, this is no charade; it's Evil, cavorting in full view. In the face of this, his sick mind short-circuits, because the sexual sadism on offer is exactly the sort of thing that floats his boat. Vogel leaves dumbstruck during the first Satanic ritual, thereby missing the moment when the Count invites the 'sacrificial victim' to take a curtain call and demonstrates the trick stiletto used to 'murder' her. Seething with a lethal cocktail of fury, arousal and piety, Vogel then captures and imprisons Anna and tracks down 'high priestess' Mrs. Cartier, slashing her to death along with her husband. During the second black mass, he leaps onstage and attacks Anna's friend Rose, who's been promoted to 'priestess' after the death of Mrs. Cartier. Cutting her throat, he runs off with the police in hot pursuit, leaving the 'Satanists' in disarray. He may be a hypocrite, but Vogel is no fake...

Jess Franco, on the other hand, was neither: by casting himself as the hypocritical Vogel, a defrocked priest turned pornographer who murders women because they make him feel like sinning, Franco marks out a definitive space that separates him from what Vogel represents. His relationship to Vogel is a display of perfect irony. Franco is totally aware of the religious problem with regard to sex, and transcends it. The nightmarish Vogel has no such knowledge, and his substitute for self-knowledge, aggrieved piety, is rejected.

If Franco is exorcising/discarding aspects of himself by playing Vogel, and also parodying his role as a purveyor of seedy shocks, then what about us? Where do we fit in? Franco's honesty demands



that we too acknowledge our role in the game. After all, Vogel's readers are hungry for pornographic blood and torture, the Satanists perform their sham rituals for a dedicated audience of voyeuristic perverts, and Franco too has a paying audience slaving over his vicious fantasies. We are very much involved, and ever since the simulated sex-murders in *Succubus* Franco has been reminding us of the fact. We, the audience, are a constant in his films – rubbernecking at live sex shows, gawping at nightclub dancers, applauding S&M murder scenes, soaking up the ambience at black masses. We're right up there alongside his killers and victims, inscribed in the psychic record of his cinema. As Franco takes the scalpel to his own motivations, he also takes a few swipes at us. *Exorcism* does more than remind us of our involvement; it rubs our noses in the pungent mess of sex and cruelty at the centre of Franco's cinema. Vogel may be a deluded moral hypocrite who measures piety by murder and evil by the rush of blood to his crotch, and Franco himself may have felt some of that Catholic rage and disgust in his blood. But what about us? Franco needles us, implying that we're either moral cowards, or armchair sadists. We lap up vicarious thrills while keeping responsibility at arm's length. Vogel murders so that Franco need not; Franco creates these visions of eroticised murder so that we can 'feel the buzz' while staying out of trouble. We can of course deny that we get our kicks out of watching torture and murder; we can put the blame on Franco. But do we not return to his cruel and twisted fantasy worlds? Just as Attila Tanner was a sort of surrogate for both Franco and his audience in *Eugenie*, so too are we implicated in *Exorcism*. We are the audience who sit and watch with rapt attention as a nude woman is force-fed with chicken's blood, terrorised, and then butchered; we are the ones who relish the gore as a bound hooker is stabbed in the vagina. Of course, we say, it's all fake. And that's true, but to what little demon inside are we feeding these scraps of simulation? We can say with some certainty that the horror genre is a process by which we throw meat down a trapdoor to the monster inside us, and the frequent conservatism of the genre (the monster/killer/threat as something other) is the padlock we place on the chain to keep the trapdoor shut. Franco's take on all this is to ask who it is we've got down there. Have we had a good look lately? Don't they look just a little familiar?

It's worth examining one more character in the film, Raimond Franval, and asking who or what he represents in this carnival of recriminations. As Vogel's publisher, sitting behind a desk at the Eurociné offices, he would seem to be a surrogate for the producers of *Exorcism*, the Lesoeurs. At first he comes across as just a decadent fool ("They think I did those killings ... I'd rather rape Raquel Welch!"). However, when the police turn up at his home, he takes a stand against them. He knows that the man they're looking for is his client, Vogel, but he doesn't turn him in. A loyal friend, an amoral anarchist, a supporter of free expression? Perhaps not; it seems more a matter of default criminality. Evidently Raimond regards the police as enemies, but his refusal to help them is

sketched in a cursory manner, making it difficult to credit him with much in the way of scruples. Is he a libertarian free spirit whose ideals forbid turning Vogel over to the police, or merely a heartless dilettante concerned with nothing more than the confluence of personal pleasure and his own liberty? He swiftly arranges a meeting with Vogel, and what follows is a fascinating negotiation between two moral outlaws, with a third party, Rose, as the voice of conventional morality:

Raimond:  
I want to talk to you.

Vogel:  
What about?

Raimond:  
That last story of yours.

Vogel:  
Did it impress you?

Raimond:  
Yes, very much. Extremely sadomasochistic. But nevertheless, it had the ring of authentic experience.

Vogel:  
What are you implying?

Rose:  
That you know a lot too much about these murders, for a man who is innocent!

Vogel:  
[feigning outrage] You mean that I...?

Raimond:  
[placatory] You don't understand. She's very upset about the disappearance of Anna.

Vogel:  
You mean... Anna's disappeared?

Rose:  
You know she's disappeared!

Vogel:  
If you suspect me, then go to the police. My conscience is clear. What about yours? Are your consciences as clear as they should be?

Raimond:  
[angrily] Our black masses, perhaps?

Vogel:  
Black masses? What do you mean?

Raimond:  
That's right. If you're interested, we're holding one later tonight, in the cloister of the Templars. It would give us great pleasure if you would attend, Mr. Vogel.

What's interesting is that Raimond avoids taking a moral stand here; he even back-pedals when Rose's anger bubbles over. He remains 'impressed' by Vogel's latest story even though he now believes it was written from personal experience, and actually invites Vogel to his next black mass, as if affronted by the suggestion that his conscience is bothering him. There's something competitive in this; Raimond wants to *impress* Vogel, to gain the respect of a real killer. Of course this is dismayingly selfish considering the danger







Anna may be in. So Raimond is more dangerous than he looks, motivated by callous self-interest and a desire to be seen to be bad. His resistance to helping the police is a knee-jerk antipathy to those who might in any way curtail his sensualist freedoms. Beneath that frivolous manner there lurks a heart of stone...

Once you unpack *Exorcism*, no one emerges unstained. However, it has to be said that this is an often opaque, shambolic film that requires more than one viewing to unravel the plot and catch a plethora of fleeting verbal asides. Working out who's who is sometimes unnecessarily difficult, with characters wandering by either unnamed, or mentioned so casually that you need the dedication of a detective working late on a case to catch the information. That said, it really does deliver as a dark, twisted sado-sexual horror story, leaving some clammy and uncomfortable thoughts lingering in one's head afterwards. No matter how much we despise Vogel and his absurd religious hang-ups, there's no denying that his vile actions are the core of the film's appeal. In *Exorcism*, Franco not only looks into his own murky soul, not only does he tease us about the extent of his own possible sickness, he demands that we take an honest look at our investment in the fantasies he liberates for our gaze. In its grim, ritualised way, *Exorcism* tries to smear the viewer with blood, rather as Lynn Monteil does to Lina Romay at the beginning. We may think we watch a film like this because we're interested in the nature of evil, but when it comes to evil, Franco would argue rather as Hannibal Lecter does to the cop who caught him in *Manhunter*, "You want the scent? Smell yourself."

**Franco on screen:** Franco gives an astonishingly creepy and intense performance, with maybe a touch of Laird Cregar and a whiff of Peter Lorre (see John Brahm's 1944 version of *The Lodger* and Fritz Lang's *M* respectively). The difference is that Vogel has no trappings of respectability to bolster his illusions of grand purpose; to look at him on the street you'd think he was a destitute, an idea that's developed further in *Exorcism*'s 1979 redux *The Sadist of Notre Dame*. On the commentary track for the Synapse DVD, Franco reveals that starring in the film meant he sometimes had to delegate camerawork to someone else, in this case Ramón Ardid, and discloses that the long, rather dull orgy scene drags on so because the Lesoeurs insisted on it. Franco asserts that he himself had something like 85% final cut.

**Cast and crew:** Lynn Monteil, whom Franco would go on to cast in *Célestine, An All Round Maid*, made no further films for him, apparently because she moved to London, where she worked for many years at the famous Raymond Revue Bar. To play Raimond, Franco cast Belgian actor Pierre Taylou, who'd already appeared for him in a couple of minor roles (see *Tender and Perverse Emanuelle* and *Kiss Me Killer*). Taylou was married at the time to France Nicolas, who plays the Countess.

**Music:** André Benichou's score is an inspired combination of melancholia and unease. The jewel in the crown is the main theme for church organ and Spanish guitar; it's an elegant conjuration,

the liturgical majesty of which rubs provocatively against the grain of Franco's grubbier imagery. Also of note is a strange and unsettling electric guitar piece, combining heavily echoed strumming with overlaid wah-wah, which is used to good effect during the extended orgy scene (in fact saving it from banality); it also features prominently in *Les Croqueuses* (the 'sexed-up' version of *Countess Perverse*).

**Locations:** Unusually for a Franco film, *Exorcism* is land-locked, however the River Seine stands in for the ocean and we never stray far from its banks. The location footage begins with a shot from the Pont Louis-Philippe of the Quai de l'Hôtel de Ville, zooming in to the clocktower of the Saint Gervais et Saint Protais Church, followed by a cut to a shot of the adjacent bridge, the Pont Marie. Anne's café meeting with Rose is on the Quai de Gesvres, directly by the Pont au Change; the café, currently called Le Mistral, is still there. Rose and Anne walk back to their apartment, spied upon by Vogel, who lurks at the Ile Saint-Louis side of the Pont Louis-Philippe. The apartment is situated just a stone's throw away, at 45 Quai de Bourbon. The subterranean vault of the Count, and the bar where Vogel meets one of his victims, is La Caveau des Oubliettes, a basement jazz club in the Latin Quarter that was once a genuine 12th Century Parisian dungeon (an 'oubliette' is a dungeon with a trap door at the top). The basement is accessed via winding stairs leading to a grotto-like cavern decorated with old chains; one can discern inscriptions on the walls left by prisoners who were tortured there ... The apartment where Raimond lives and the chateau that Vogel seems to own are probably the same building, judging by the style of window frames and the similar framed prints on the walls. It's a slightly run-down old chateau on the outskirts of Paris, near Fontenay-Tressigny in the Val de Marne, and judging by Pierre Chevalier's *Hommes de joie* (a Eurociné porno production shot concurrently with *Exorcism* with many of the same cast members) the place was probably some kind of hotel (in the Chevalier film one can see a cigarette machine in the entrance hall) ... The lobby of the hotel where Vogel goes to spy on Anna and Rose is the same one seen during Guy Delorme's flashback scenes in *Lorna... the Exorcist*. Ramón Ardid is the receptionist in both films, and he's wearing the same clothes, suggesting that shots were grabbed for both films at the same time.

**Connections:** Those common Franco names 'Malou' and 'Tanner' make a comeback, this time allotted to the cops investigating the case. Although police scenes are generally tiresome in horror movies, the chippy relationship between Olivier Mathot's grumbling Inspector Tanner and the 'intellectual' Malou is quite amusing; referring to the killer, the latter speculates that "He could be a Torquemada of the present day", before musing, "Our technological age leads to a return to superstition" – pretty abstruse stuff for a movie cop! ... Raimond Franval takes his surname from the short story *Eugénie de Franval* by the Marquis de Sade, first published in the collection *Les Crimes de l'amour, Nouvelles héroïques et tragiques*.

**Other versions:** *Exorcism* is yet another fragmented text, having gone through several changes after initial completion. For a start, a 'clothed' export version was simultaneously with the more explicit 'nude' version, in anticipation of likely censorship. The nude version, Franco's preferred cut of the 1974 film, only ever played theatrically in Belgium, where it opened in July as *Exorcismes et Messes noires* ('Exorcisms and Black Masses'). Meanwhile the clothed version – retitled *Demoniac* – was deemed by Eurociné to be lacking in bite, and so inserts were added to make the stabbings more graphic: Franco states that they were shot by porn director Claude Sendron (who plays the Count in the story) some six or seven months after the original was completed. When the result was given an 'X' by the French censor, Franco found himself in an absurd situation. He had not wanted the graphic violence, and sexual elements such as the protracted orgy had been foisted upon him by producer Marius Lesoeur. To make matters worse, now that the film had been slapped with an X-rating, Marius Lesoeur argued that if the film was destined to play sex cinemas, it didn't have enough sex to compete with other hardcore titles on the circuit! Franco therefore agreed to shoot new hardcore inserts himself, and the results were, to say the least, startling...

*Obsession* lists the 'X'-certificate version as *Sexorcismes*, while French official sources refer to it as *Sexorcisme*. Of the two versions released on French video in the early 1980s by a company called Ciné-7, one bears neither of these onscreen titles (instead coming up as plain old *Exorcisme*) while the other opts for *Sexorcismes*, using a different title font which zooms towards us over the original moving image, suggesting that it originated with the theatrical release and was not created purely for video. (The two Ciné-7 video releases are otherwise identical.)

Although structurally it's a terrible muddle, *Sexorcismes* is nevertheless a significant Franco work in its own right, leading us into territory quite beyond the pale for any director with a career outside of pornography. Basically, and not to put too fine a point on it, Franco inserts himself into the hardcore action. The first additional material appears after Vogel (or Monsieur Rochelle as he's called in this version) overhears Raimond and Anna joking that they will stage a real black mass. Instead of cutting to Anna's café rendezvous with Rose, the camera ascends a wooden staircase to a secret room in the killer's house, a place unseen and unsuspected in *Exorcism*. Inside, in a cramped, starkly lit attic chamber, we see a nude dark-haired woman chained to the ceiling. What happens next is possibly the last word on the subject of the long-fabled romance between movie director and movie actress. We see Franco himself, in shots that brook no argument about stand-ins or stunt doubles, pouncing upon the woman and lapping at her pussy, entering her sex with his tongue and rubbing his penis against her vagina.

Many filmmakers, respectable or otherwise, have used the cinema as a means to pursue women. However, no one with a career outside of pure pornography has ever grappled with the lustful basis of film so directly. It's especially fitting that this

metaphorical 'secret chamber' in Jess Franco's cinema (rarely seen before the days of the internet, and still unavailable on DVD or Blu-ray) should be hidden away on another floor of the killer's house, to be reached via a concealed stairway unexplored in the 'mainstream' version. It's fitting because Franco's entire cinema can be seen as architectural; it's like a sprawling mansion, with an elegant palatial hallway here, a dilapidated jerry-built wing there. It has many floors, numerous cellars and attics, and a byzantine maze of obscure rooms rarely visited. It even has parts that are incomplete, abandoned or unfinished. If one thinks about Franco's work in this way, then the last shot of the original *Exorcism* – a puzzling, unmotivated zoom into an upstairs window – resonates all the more. In *Exorcism* it seems simply a crude way of wrapping things up. Once we've seen *Sexorcismes*, however, that same shot takes on a tantalising significance.

*Sexorcismes* then adds around six minutes of tedious hardcore footage (not featuring Jess Franco) to the already tiresome *Exorcism* orgy scene, and follows it with an extra five minutes of hardcore action involving Pierre Taylou and Lina Romay, the latter of whom is wearing a long black wig reaching down to her waist. Given that these inserts were filmed in 1975, perhaps they were obtained during the shooting of *Midnight Party*, in which both Taylou and Romay featured? (Romay had a shaggy perm at the time so the *Sexorcismes* wig may have been necessary to match her straight-haired style in *Exorcism*).

Another example of how much further Franco was willing to go crops up when he adds hardcore penetration shots to the sequence in which Vogel/Rochelle menaces Gina (played by Caroline Rivière, Franco's stepdaughter), giving the impression that he has raped the girl before murdering her. Shocking? I should point out that in this instance Franco is *not* the actor in the inserts – the male buttocks we see are firm, the thighs young and fit. Nor is Rivière the actress in the inserts. Whatever *else* Franco is willing to do on camera, he draws the line at making out with his stepdaughter!

*Sexorcismes* collapses into incoherence with a scene inserted after Vogel's tormenting of Anna. It features an erect male fingering a woman's vagina and bears no similarity in any way to the surrounding footage; wrong lighting, wrong skin texture, wrong hair colour, wrong everything. Does the insert relate to Vogel's abuse of Anna? If it is meant to do so, then Franco is surrendering any attempt to make sense, because we then cut to a scene that seems to suggest a *second* Vogel is spying on his own sex act from a hotel window! Only after several minutes of this non-sequitur hardcore humping do we cut to the next scene from *Exorcism*, with Raimond and Rose in bed together, which is the scene to which the insert probably relates (not that it matches it or cuts together with it successfully). In other words, an already precarious blend of new and old material is falling into chaos.

*Sexorcismes* ceases to be a valuable addition to Franco's canon after that first transgressive hour, with all manner of egregious faults in the second half. With one more hardcore engagement to







come between Franco and his bound actress (intercut this time with facial close-ups to suggest Lina Romay is the victim), it's still worth persisting to the end, if only to ask yourself whether the tightly framed shot of an erect penis ejaculating on a woman's vagina was contributed by Franco himself; surely the only time in history that anyone will ask that question about a winner of a Goya Lifetime Achievement Award.

"*They say you used to be a priest, once*", says Anna to Vogel when they meet for the first time at the offices of "The Dagger and the Garter". Vogel responds, "*Some people will say anything*", but Raimond pushes the point, asking, "*Tell me Vogel, are you an unfrocked priest, or what?*". Vogel stonewalls: "*What difference does it make?*". Well it turns out to make quite a lot of difference - enough, in fact, to justify a remount! The question of Vogel's religious background is answered in Franco's *Exorcism-redux*, *The Sadist of Notre Dame* (1979) but in *Exorcism* and *Sexorcismes* it's left hanging: a tease I'm afraid I must mimic, as I'll be discussing *The Sadist of Notre Dame* in Volume Two of this book. Unlike previous refit jobs, such as *Le Miroir obscène* or *Les Croqueuses*, it incorporates enough new material, and exhibits enough thought and care, to be considered a stand-alone title, and justifies Franco's proud assertion that it is the ultimate rendition of the project he began in 1974...

## CÉLESTINE, AN ALL ROUND MAID

France 1974

French visa number: 42612

Original theatrical title in country of origin

**Célestine..... bonne à tout faire**

*Célestine, The Maid Who Does Everything*

Alternative titles

**Célestine bonne à tout faire** (CFFP production stills)

**Célestine... bonne à tout faire...** (FR poster artwork)

**Célestine Maid at Your Service** (UK theatrical)

**...infedelmente vostra Celestina tuttofare** (IT theatrical)

*Unfaithfully Your Maid Célestine*

**Mädchen für Intime Stunden** (GER theatrical)

*Girl for Intimate Hours*

**Célestine... meid voor alle work** (BEL poster)

*Célestine ... Maid for All Work*

**Ein Mädchen für Alle** (GER video) *A Woman for Everyone*

**Célestine** (US theatrical poster/UK 'Go Video' sleeve)

**Célestine, bonne à tout faire** (FR DVD cover)

**Célestine Mädchen für Intime Stunden** (GER Blu-ray)

Production company

**Comptoir Français du Film Production** (Paris)

Theatrical distributors

**Comptoir Français du Film Production** (Paris)

**Cinecenta Film Distributors** (London) [club distribution]

**Cineworld Corporation** (USA)

Timeline

Shooting date	from 14 March	1974
French visa issued	30 July	1974
France	03 October	1974
UK 'X' certificate granted	24 October	1974
Belgium (Brussels)	23 January	1975
Italy (Turin)	09 June	1975
UK (Portsmouth)	28 June	1975
USA (Sandusky OH)	15 December	1976

Theatrical running time

France	91m
UK	79m (cut from 84m01s)

**Cast:** **Lina Romay** (Célestine). **Howard Vernon** (M. Le Duc, 'grandfather'). **Olivier Mathot** (M. Le Comte de la Fraguette, 'Gold Horn'). **Pamela Stanford** (Mademoiselle Martine). **Bigotini** (Malou, the valet). **Lynn Monteil** [as 'Lyne de Monteil'] (the countess Hermonie de la Fragette). **Anna Gladyssek** [as 'Anne Garrec'] (Jeanine, Célestine's friend). **Henri Guégan** [as 'Philippe Guégan'] (Matthias Vayonne, a thief). **Ramón Ardid** (Sébastien, aka 'Rapido'). **Jean-Pierre Granet** [as 'Laurent Tenarg'] (Marc, Le Comte's son). **Catherine Laferrière** (the cook - Sébastien's wife). *uncredited:* **Monica Swinn** (one of Loulou's prostitutes/Madame Ursule, 'governess' [two roles]). **Jean-Pierre Bouyxou** (1st brothel raid policeman). **Jess Franco** (man awakened by fleeing prostitutes).

**Credits:** director: **Jess Franco**. screenplay, adaptation & dialogue by **Nicole Franco** [Guettard]. director of photography: **Etienne Rosenfeld**. editor: **Gérard Kikoïne**. music by **Paul de Senneville**, **Olivier Toussaint**. presented by [i.e. producer]: **Robert de Nesle**. unit manager: **Michel Breuil**. production secretary: **Fernande Meunier**. assistant director: **Richard Deconinck** [aka 'Bigotini']. press photographer: **Howard Vernon** [as 'Mario Lippert']. make-up: **Denise Tyack**. film stock: **Kodak Eastmancolor**. laboratory: **C.T.M.**. music publisher: **Tremplin**. [Note: Alain Petit adds: co-still photography: **Ramón Ardid**.]

**Synopsis:** *France, in the 18th Century. Thrown out of Madame Loulou's brothel after a police raid, Célestine and her friend Jeanine flee across the fields in their lingerie. They separate, but agree to rendezvous later. At nightfall, Célestine sneaks into the grounds of a large chateau.*

She is spotted by Sebastian, the gardener, who hides her in the barn. They have passionate sex before Sébastien returns to his wife. In the morning, Malou the valet discovers Célestine. Fortunately, he's a good-natured sort who takes a shine to the girl and informs her that the chateau belongs to the Count and Countess of Bringuette, who are currently seeking a servant. The Countess, a frigid aristocrat, is hard work, but Célestine wins a job as a maid thanks to her guile and attractiveness. The other residents at the household are M. Le Comte de la Fraguette, whom Célestine recognises as one of the regular customers at Madame Loulou's, Marc, the Count's son, Martine, the Count's prudish niece, and the Count's father the Duke, a libidinous old goat with a fixation on erotic literature. Chief among the female staff is Ursule, a stern lesbian governess. All of them have needs that Célestine can 'service'. Célestine learns that Martine is secretly in love with Marc, so she sets about helping her to seduce him. Soon, Célestine realises she has taken on more than she can handle: everyone is vying for her sexual attentions. She therefore persuades the household to hire her friend Jeanine, who willingly lends a hand with the sexual chores too. Meanwhile, Matthias, a mean and vicious pimp, learns of Célestine's new life and blackmails her into stealing valuables from the chateau. On the advice of the Duke, who has regained his vigour thanks to Célestine's readings from the Marquis de Sade, the household bands together to save Célestine and Jeanine and defeat the pimp. However, all things must change: Malou finds love with Ursule, Marc spends his nights in the company of his loving cousin, the Countess loses her frigidity and makes constant love to her horny husband, while Sébastien resolves to honour his wife and be faithful to her. Célestine and Jeanine, having changed the household forever, leave with a tinge of sadness...

**Production notes:** After the recent spate of Eurociné projects, Franco turned his attention to a run of five films for Robert de Nesle's Comptoir Français du Film Production, beginning on 14 March 1974 with *Célestine, bonne à tout faire*...

**Review:** This talky, hyperactive farce is the only one of Franco's three mid-seventies comedies currently available in English, and in the absence of much fan enthusiasm for the others it's likely remain so for quite some time. When it comes to 'saucy sex comedy à la française' my tolerance is low; regrettably, *Célestine* is jammed to the gusset with the sort of frivolous 'slap-and-tickle' that I personally find unbearable. It's a film of twanging bedsprings, comedy leering, haywain romping, and jolly fat men going cross-eyed during oral sex. Howard Vernon puts in a pungently over-ripe turn as the Duke, a bed-ridden 'dirty old man' just a squint away from Benny Hill or Sid James. Hill's 'cheeky' humour is also echoed by the irritating habit of having the actors prance around on tip-toe, while the faux-harpsichord score mercilessly pumps up the jolliness factor. Generally the verbose script brings out the worst in everyone; Franco's direction, as if paralysed by so much talking, is reduced to 'point the camera and shoot', and for most of the cast (chiefly the men, it's fair to say) comic acting is really just a matter of going over the top.

Perhaps I'm just a grumpy old pervert; perhaps I'm so hooked on Franco's sadomasochistic sex that I can't enjoy the 'happy' version. If so, I'm clearly the wrong person to appreciate *Célestine*'s brand of softcore drollery. I can honestly say I've never burst into joyful laughter during sex, nor have I ever felt that a good fuck would be improved by added giggling. 'Silly saucy sexy fun' might be the sort of strap-line to sell DVDs of this movie, but to my ears the words are like fingernails down a comedy blackboard. When you add the final ingredient – a lesson in healthy sexual freedom dispensed by a simultaneously air-headed and worldly wise lead character – then *Célestine* is truly a servant's chore to watch.

**Franco on screen:** Franco makes a brief appearance as a sleeping man awoken by Célestine and her friend Jeanine.

**Cast and crew:** *Célestine* is Lina Romay's film, as much as was *Female Vampire*; it's a showcase for her beauty, her uninhibited sexual presence, and her comic acting skills, of which the first two are undeniable. In terms of her gift for comedy she's certainly at home with the role, and has no difficulty negotiating the script, which as noted is a great deal busier than usual for a Franco film of the period. It's a cheeky, playful performance – relentlessly so in fact. That she plays only a few notes on the scale is not her fault; within the circumscription of the part she's entirely successful ... This is an interesting film for those curious about Ramón Ardid, Lina Romay's husband before Franco. We're reminded by his youthful looks and demeanour that theirs was a tenderfoot affair; Romay was only eighteen when she first met Franco, and Ardid himself looks barely older. This is Ardid's most featured role in Franco's cinema, in terms of both screen time and frequency of close-ups ... Monica Swinn plays two completely disconnected roles in the same story; a prostitute at the start of the film, and the chateau's Governess for the rest.

**Music:** Written by regular collaborators Paul de Senneville and Olivier Toussaint (*Convoi de femmes*; *Les Tripoteuses*; *French Deep Throat*; *Kiss Me with Lust*), this has to be my least favourite Franco score, a chortling rinky-dink keyboard nightmare that makes watching the film twice as difficult. It's a pity, because Senneville and Toussaint delivered a wonderful score for a roughly contemporary French porno film, Pierre-Claude Garnier's oddball *Peeping Tom in the Limelight* (1975).

**Locations:** It's a sure sign you're the wrong audience for a sex film when you find yourself admiring the furnishings more than the humping. That said, the key location is stunning; the lavishly decorated mansion near Fontenay-Tressigny in the Val de Marne that also provided the setting for Franco's disturbing *Exorcism*.

**UK theatrical release:** Submitted to the BBFC by Cinecenta Film Distribution as *Célestine, Maid at Your Service*, with a running time of 84m1s, the film received an 'X' certificate on the 24th October 1974. A *Continental Film Review* photospread appeared in March 1975, heralding the film's release in UK sex cinemas. By July 1975 it had scored playdates at the Birmingham Jacey, and other provincial venues. See Appendix for more details.



**Connections:** *Célestine, An All Round Maid* borrows the lead character's name and occupation, though little else, from Octave Mirbeau's 1900 novel *Diary of a Chambermaid*, filmed by Renoir in 1946 and Buñuel in 1964. It is otherwise barely connected: the hypocrisies of the rich and powerful are given a gentle rib-poking, but nothing of the abrasive spirit of Mirbeau emerges. In one of the few direct parallels between book and film, a thief steals from the rich household at which Célestine works, making off with all their treasures. In Franco's film, Célestine is pressed against her will into helping the odious criminal, her one-time pimp. In the book, Célestine is not directly involved, but looks on with savage glee as the household suffers the pangs of deprivation and outrage. Soaking up with delight the anguish of her employers, she muses on the wonderful criminal who has pulled off so great a theft: "In crime there is something violent, solemn, justiciary, religious, which frightens me, to be sure, but which also leaves in me – how shall I express it? – a feeling of admiration. No, not of admiration, since admiration is a moral feeling, a spiritual excitement, whereas that which I feel influences and excites only my flesh. It is like a brutal shock throughout my physical being, at once painful and delicious, a sorrowful and swooning rape of my sex. It is curious, doubtless it is peculiar, perhaps it is horrible – and I cannot explain the real cause of these strange and powerful sensations – but in me every crime, especially murder, has secret relationships with love. Yes, indeed! A fine crime takes hold of me just as a fine man does." She also admits to her diary, "I would have liked to cry out, 'Well done! Well done!' And above all I would have liked to know these admirable and sublime thieves, in order to thank them in the name of all the ragamuffins, and to embrace them, as brothers."<sup>2</sup> To be fair, *Célestine, An All Round Maid* does not claim to be an adaptation of Mirbeau's text, but you may find yourself wondering why Franco, having borrowed a few of its trappings, didn't attempt something closer; in fact the politics of the book are actually inverted, and the adversarial currents diverted, with Célestine serving to unite disparate and dysfunctional elements in an aristocratic household. The film plays like a vulgarised adaptation of Pasolini's *Teorema*, where instead of forcing hypocrisies into the light and fracturing the bourgeois illusion of family, the heroine heals the household without challenging the social or sexual hierarchies within.

**Other versions:** In 1983 Franco remade the film as *El abuelo, la condesa y escarlata la traviesa*, which officially named Octave Mirbeau as an inspiration in the credits. The film was completed but strangely it has never been released.

## LORNA... THE EXORCIST

**France 1974**

French visa number: 42642

*Original theatrical title in country of origin*

**Lorna... l'exorciste** (FR)

*Alternative titles*

**Les Possédées du diable (Lorna, l'exorciste)** (FR alt. theatrical/FR video) *The Devil's Possessed (Lorna the Exorcist)*

**Linda** (USA theatrical)

**Luscious Linda** (US alt. theatrical poster title)

**Sexy diabolic story** (IT theatrical)

**Les Possédées du diable** (FR alt. video)

**Lorna the Exorcist** (BEL press artwork using English title)

*Unconfirmed titles*

**Lorna** (FR alt. [OB])

**Les Possédées du démon** (FR alt. - see 'Other versions')

*Production company*

**Comptoir Français du Film Production** (Paris)

*Theatrical distributors*

**Comptoir Français du Film Production** (Paris)

**Univers Galaxie** (Paris)

**Tempar Releasing** (New York)

*Timeline*

Shooting date	April	1974
France	21 August	1974
French visa issued	24 September	1974
USA (Fayetteville, AR) as <i>Linda</i>	26 October	1975
Belgium (Brussels)	18 December	1975
USA (Tucson, AZ) as <i>Luscious Linda</i>	21 May	1976
Italy (Turin) as <i>Sexy Diabolic Story</i>	19 August	1981

*Theatrical running time*

France	90m
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**Cast:** **Pamela Stanford** (Lorna Greene). **Guy Delorme** (Patrick Barielle, Linda's father). **Lina Romay** (Linda Barielle). **Jacqueline Laurent** (Marianne Barielle, Linda's mother). **Howard Vernon** (Mauricius, Lorna's henchman). **Bigotini** (manager of the Frantel Hotel). **Catherine Laferrière** (Marielle, the possessed woman). *uncredited:* **Jess Franco** (doctor). **Ramón Ardid** (male nurse/hotel receptionist [two roles]). **Caroline Rivière** (woman on yacht).

**Credits:** director: **Jess Franco**. screenplay, adaptation & dialogue:

**Nicole Franco [Guettard]**, director of photography: **Etienne Rosenfeld**, editor: **Gérard Kikoïne**, music: **André Benichou**, **Robert de Nesle**, presented by [i.e. producer]: **Robert de Nesle**, production secretary: **Fernande Meunier**, assistant director: **Richard Deconinck** [aka 'Bigotini'], still photography: **Howard Vernon** [as 'Mario Lippert'], make-up: **Catherine Demesmeaker**, filmed in **Eastmancolor**, film stock: **Kodak Eastmancolor**, laboratory: **L.T.C.** (Saint Cloud), music publisher: **Editions Jacques Nicolet**, Pamela Stanford's gowns created by **Paco Rabane**. "We thank the municipality and manager of the Casino of La Grande Motte for their gracious assistance supplied during production."

**Synopsis:** *Linda Mariel is a beautiful teenage girl who experiences strange dreams in which she makes love to an older woman. On her 18th birthday her wealthy parents, Patrick and Marianne, plan to take her for a holiday to Saint Tropez. Before they can set off, Patrick receives a telephone call from a woman called Lorna, who demands he come to Camargue instead. To the puzzlement of his wife and daughter, who know nothing of the call, he reroutes the family vacation to La Grande Motte, a holiday resort in Camargue. At the hotel, Patrick receives another call from Lorna (whom we recognise as the woman in Linda's dreams). She insists that he come to her apartment. Making excuses, he visits Lorna, who demands that he hand over his daughter. We learn that they met at a casino nineteen years ago, while Patrick was on a losing streak. Lorna, a witch, used her malefic influence to assure his winnings, and promised him a future of wealth and happiness if he would promise to give to her his first, as yet unconceived, daughter, on the child's eighteenth birthday. Crazy with lust and blinded by his winnings, Patrick agreed to this 'deal with the devil'. He returned to his wife a rich man, and the couple made love. Linda was born nine months later. Now Linda is eighteen, and Lorna will stop at nothing to claim her.*

**Production notes:** In April, the emotional weather of Franco's cinema grew more turbulent. With a small cast and crew he took off to the Languedoc region in Southern France, fetching up at a purpose-built tourist resort called La Grande Motte. There, surrounded by striking modernist architecture resembling a seaside resort on Mars, he made one of the darkest films of his career: *Lorna... the Exorcist*. The exact shooting dates are unknown, but two details help to narrow things down. Firstly, in a scene where a deranged woman (Laferrière) rips pages out of a magazine, we glimpse two short story titles: *Rush Hour* (by Daniel Voltz) and *The Very Last Word* (by Marco Barra). Research indicates that these two stories appeared together in the January 1974 issue of *Playgirl*. More accurately, the shoot can be dated by reference to *Les Croqueuses*, the 'porno version' of the previous year's *Countess Perverse*. New footage for *Les Croqueuses* was collected by Franco during the filming of *Lorna*, using one of its key hotel room locations. A newspaper headline visible in *Les Croqueuses* dates the shoot to the 13th April 1974: it's therefore highly likely that *Lorna* was shot during April '74.

**Review:** As a demonstration of the unclean spirit Jess Franco can summon to the screen with the most minimal of resources, *Lorna... the Exorcist* is without equal. A strange sickly current swirls through this astonishing work, a potent blend of sex and horror emanating from the most mysterious bottle in Franco's cine-apothecary. Here is a film with no major scenes of violence, no special effects, and the lowest of budgets, set for the most part in bland hotel rooms, casinos and bars, yet it carries a powerful charge of the uncanny. It isn't perfect - perfection doesn't exist in Franco's world - but there are passages here that throb with all that is outlandish and troubling in his cinema. The title may seem meaningless (there is no exorcist in the film, least of all Lorna, who's actually a witch), and the pace may be too druggy for casual viewers, but *Lorna... the Exorcist* is still top-drawer Franco. Its depressive brooding atmosphere, and the unsettling performances of Lina Romay and Pamela Stanford, make it one of his most haunting and memorable creations.

After a shot of baby apples on a tree (young fruit on the edge of maturity), we're introduced to two women: one is Lorna (Pamela Stanford), a vampish woman in a curly blonde wig and some seriously over-the-top eye make-up; the other is Linda (Lina Romay), a sultry young brunette on the brink of womanhood. First seen holding a telephone, Lorna appears to have summoned Linda to her bedchamber because a second or two later the younger girl appears from behind a lace curtain. As the two lay down on a bed and proceed to kiss and fondle each other we enter a languid borderless limbo, with intimate close-ups guiding us to the threshold of Franco's most intense erotic obsession: the vagina. Romay moves like a sleepwalker in an erotic reverie, while Stanford commands the screen like a silent movie goddess; it's like a lesbian Dr. Caligari receiving oral sex from a female Cesare. Everything happens in what we might call 'real-time slow motion', Franco's default speed for sex. Nothing is rushed or hasty or excitable. The scene clocks in at nine narcotic minutes, which to be honest would probably test the patience were it not for André Benichou's sensuously curling music, which holds the viewer in a state of dreamy psychotropic suspension.

As the scene reaches its contemplative climax, twittering birdsong in the background acts as a segue into the real world. Linda turns out to have been daydreaming, standing by an open window with a faraway look in her eyes. She's just turned eighteen, the beautiful daughter of a wealthy couple, Patrick and Marianne Mariel. In a more conventional film, one would assume that Linda had been enjoying a private fantasy, but there was something about the other woman that suggested great power; we sense that she's more than just a recollection or a fantasy. It's common in supernatural fiction for a malign presence to enter someone's dreams; here the supernatural antagonist can enter Linda's mind while she daydreams, or indulges a sexual fantasy. It's a brilliantly unsettling idea, one that blurs the line between dreaming and wakefulness. Lorna turns up again while Linda is enjoying a spot of bath-time masturbation. At this point Linda still acts as though





she's 'creating' Lorna within a private fantasy: she is neither shocked nor confused when Lorna appears, merely gazing at her in speculative arousal as if a vivid fantasy has appeared on the stage of her imagination. This notion that fantasy figures may actually have a supernatural life of their own is the film's chief innovation. Only during the third visitation does Linda realise that an exterior being has been invading her fantasies, as Lorna reveals her name, her intentions, her claim to parentage, and her malefic ability to enter Linda's mind: *"I am Lorna, your mother [...] I have chosen to enter your subconscious so as to reach you and gain your trust. In your sleep the meaning of my words will penetrate the most secret corners of your mind [...] So often have my thoughts come to visit your soul and you never doubted them my love."*

The viewer may already have guessed that the woman in Linda's fantasies is the same one who telephones Linda's father, demanding he re-route his family holiday to the Camargue, but the narrative does not disclose this straight away. For the first third of the film Linda's fantasy life operates on a separate track to the rest of the story. This creates a curious, unstable narrative in which uncertainty and ambiguity prevail over reason. The first time we see Lorna outside of Linda's sexual imagination is at the hotel nightclub where she speaks to Patrick. She's wearing a silver wig in place of the previous brassy curls, though thanks to the extraordinary eye make-up she's clearly the same woman. After a hallucinatory drive along the science-fictional sea-front of La Grande Motte, Patrick goes to Lorna's apartment where we begin to understand the plot that unites Linda's fantasies and her father's problems.

It emerges that Lorna is a witch. Eighteen years ago, her magical powers gave Patrick the great wealth he now enjoys. In return for making him rich, Lorna demanded the body and soul of his yet to be conceived first child. In the depths of financial despair, he agreed to Lorna's seemingly absurd pact: and now she's ready to collect. In the first half hour we see the Mariel family holiday repeatedly interrupted by Lorna's telephone calls demanding to see Patrick - at the casino, at the nightclub, at her apartment. On each occasion Patrick slips nervously away with no plausible excuse, while his wife and daughter remain mute and incurious. This plot strand may be happening in the 'real world' but it has an odd nightmare quality, reminiscent of anxiety dreams in which one dreads the immanent unveiling of a nameless secret, the revelation of which is constantly deferred. Just as Lorna is able to slip into Linda's mind, so too the depicted boundary between the rational universe and the supernatural are transgressed by Franco's gradually more oneiric approach to both.

Lorna is a truly monstrous figure. Her designs upon Linda are the enactment of a rapaciously controlling will; she even refers to the girl as her 'possession'. This is not a tale of liberating desire; it's a tale of manipulation and psychic rape. Meanwhile, the fact that Lorna regards herself as Linda's mother while engaging in sexual seduction takes the film into an extraordinary realm of perversity. Lorna claims that Linda was born to Marianne only because she,

Lorna, willed it. She says that she pleased Patrick 'through' Marianne (in flashback we hear Patrick murmuring Lorna's name during Linda's conception). She also claims to be responsible for Marianne becoming pregnant, which helps to make sense of the film's most dauntingly horrible image...

I'm talking about 'the scene with the crabs', as anyone who's heard anything about the film probably knows it. Without warning, Marianne's vagina disgorges tiny sea-crabs, an idea that shocks as much for its surrealism as for its ability to inspire revulsion. Mondo Macabro's excellent DVD translation clarifies for English-speaking viewers that Lorna has control of Marianne's womb, and so can implant within it whatever she wants: either a child, for whom Marianne must act as unwitting surrogate mother, or a punishing infestation, which drives the poor woman quite mad and ultimately kills her. Thanks to a new scene in Mondo Macabro's expanded edition, the eagle-eyed viewer may notice that it's a seafood restaurant sign (featuring a lobster) which alerts Patrick to the exact whereabouts of Lorna's apartment. Could it be that 'the scene with the crabs' was inspired by the very same sign? Perhaps both evil Lorna and crazy Jess Franco were inspired while leaning out of a hotel window and seeing an enigmatic crustacean on a sign across the street?

But if the randomness of the image can be partially emolliated by context, there's still the element of repulsion to contend with, a repulsion that must have had a powerful negative charge for the filmmaker himself. No one who has watched more than a handful of his films could fail to notice that when it comes to sexual preference, Jess Franco is a pussy-hound. Not for him the mammary excesses of Russ Meyer or the ass-fetishism of Tinto Brass. Long legs? Forget it. Tapering waists or luxurious hair? Pah. For Franco it all comes down to pussy. His camera is obsessed with it, zooming and peering and staring. The relentless, uninhibited way that Franco seeks out the vagina is one of the hallmarks of his cinema. He's also fond of filming cunnilingus, by no means a universal predilection in heterosexual porn. So for a man in love with pussy, this shocking scene, in which monstrous sea-lice come crawling out of a woman's sex, is a concentrated nightmare. That which is most desired becomes repugnant and unfamiliar. It's also significant that the victim is Linda's mother - this, coupled with Stanford playing an 'incestuous witch' means that *Lorna* is among the most pathologically divided of Franco's horror films. Clearly we're dealing with a nightmare of monstrous motherhood, involving two contrasting maternal figures; one who is psychically dominant but physically sterile, and another who is nurturing but powerlessly fecund, unable even to choose which species she gives birth to. Having dominated the 'good mother', tricked and defeated the cheating father, and violated the bond of matrimony, Lorna assumes total power during the film's climactic rape, as she draws the mesmerised Linda into a prolonged breast-sucking sequence, heavy with unsavoury incestuous implications, then plunders the teenager's virginity with a carved phallus, a strange and obscurely



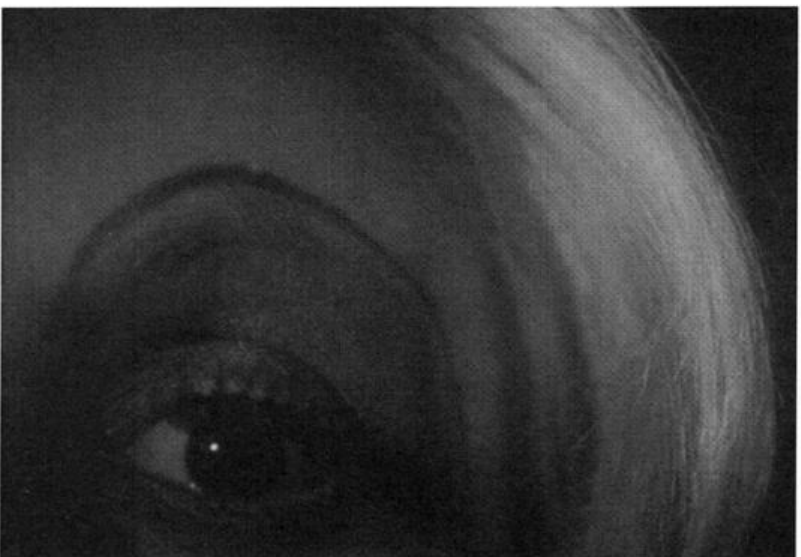
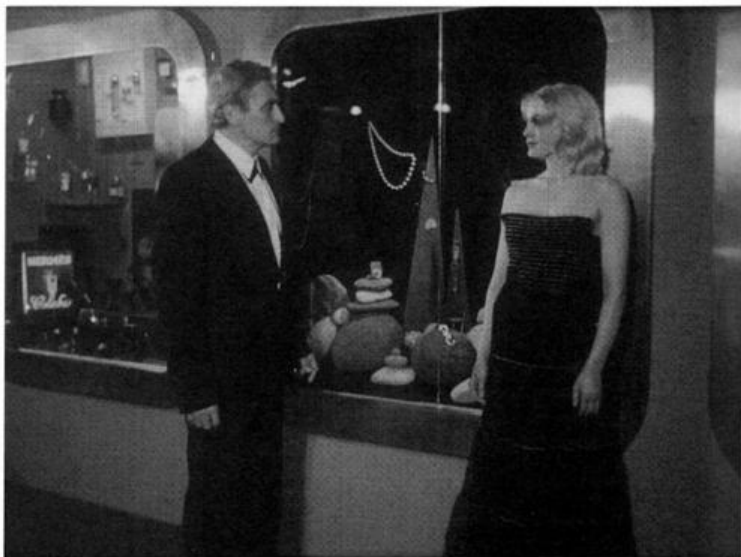
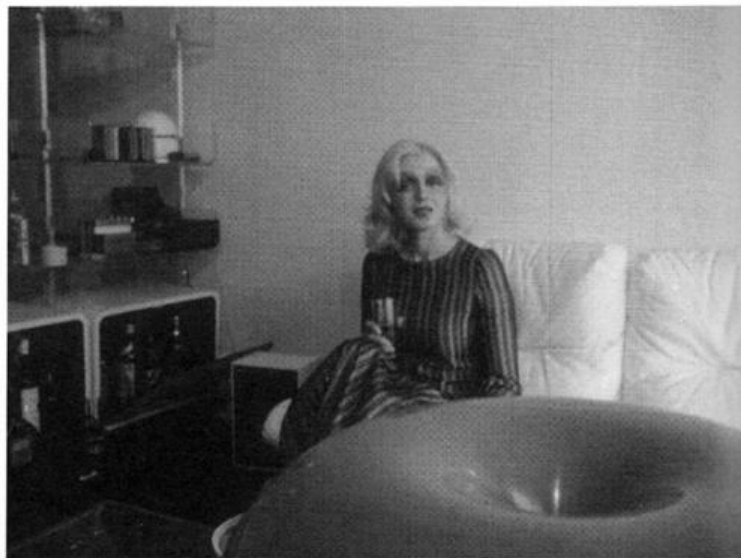
*Left:*  
Shot by Patrick, Lorna (Pamela Stanford) expires, safe in the knowledge that she will reincarnate in the body of his lovely young daughter Linda.  
Linda (Romay), now possessed, kills her father (Delorme) with a knife to the back of the neck, a method based on the corrida which first appeared in Franco's cinema in *Succubus* (1967). Note the matching curtains and bedspread, with geometric motifs echoing the post-modern design of the Grande Motte hotel.



*Above:*  
Bigotini (aka Rick Deconinck) - who appears in a small role as a hotel concierge - prepares the curious dildo which Lorna uses to transfer her malefic will permanently into Linda.

*Below:*  
Shooting scenes for the start of the film, Jacqueline Laurent and Jess Franco clown around with Guy Delorme at the location used for the Barielle family home.







disgusting object hewn in the shape of a human penis but coloured more like a dog's. Ramming it between Linda's legs, she then pulls it back out and sucks it. In this weird and disturbing scene Franco achieves a violation of the incest taboo that would stand as his most transgressive until the hardcore free-for-all *Falo Crest* (1987).

Does Lorna now 'possess' Linda? This is what we've been led to expect, but it's not so simple. Before penetrating the girl, Lorna declares, "I'm going to transmit to you all of my powers." Afterwards, when Patrick finds Lorna's apartment and shoots her, she tells him, "The one destined by fate to replace me has taken over your lovely child." So Lorna is *not* reborn in Linda; instead she passes something on to her, a spiritual infestation to echo the physical infestation earlier. The first thing the new Linda does is to seduce and then murder her father. As the film ends, we're left with the ultimate Satanic threat realised; the daughter has murdered the father, shattered patriarchal law, and through the death of Lorna linked hands in a chain of endless perversion. Unlike the Satanic possession of *The Exorcist*, there is no recourse to a higher authority; no safe pair of Ecclesiastical hands to break the fall. And so the film's 'incoherent' title has meaning after all: it speaks of a complete disjuncture between corruption and salvation. In a film called *Lorna... the Exorcist*, who could have guessed that a row of dots would signify more than either of the terms it separates?

*Lorna* is a strange and perplexing experience made with the casual rapidity so common to Franco's work of the mid-1970s. But while it's clearly shot in haste, it spins its mesmerising web at leisure. Perhaps Franco stretches the material a little thin here and there – maybe the story could do with another strand, a bit more flesh on the bone. However, as long as you surrender to its measured rhythm, the film takes you to another place. One's sense of time is frequently overwhelmed by Franco's tranquil pacing and André Benichou's psychedelically disorientating music, and while the result isn't seamless, it's often like a waking dream, with a shuddering sense of illicit eroticism sliding into nightmare. It's maybe not the ideal place for a Franco novice to start, but it will very much reward those who've begun to acclimatise to his style and who feel they're ready for the hard stuff. A small cast, a claustrophobic atmosphere, a sense of encroaching sickness, mingled with the fermenting fruits of perverse desire; this is Franco at his most extraordinary.

**Franco on screen:** Jess plays the head of the private clinic who's caring for Lorna's discarded former lover. Has anyone checked his credentials? Surely it's odd for a patient to attend psychiatric consultations wearing just a blouse, sexy stockings and no knickers?

**Cast and crew:** The film belongs to the extraordinary Pamela Stanford, whose stunning appearance and uninhibited sensuality electrify this film. Stanford was born Monique Delauney (30 October 1950) in Fontainebleau near Paris, and trained as a dancer before entering the film industry in 1970. She appeared in a string of pornographic and semi-pornographic roles, including eight films for Franco, four with Alain Payet (*Prostitution clandestine*,

1975; *Furies sexuelles*, 1976; *Train spécial pour SS*, 1977; *Nathalie, Fugitive from Hell*, 1978), one for José Bénazéraf (*Frustration*, 1971), and numerous Eurociné also-rans. She went on to be a powerful presence in Franco's cinema, co-starring in *Les Grandes Emmerdeuses* and *Sexy Sisters*, and playing smaller supporting roles in *Les Chatouilleuses*, *Le Jouisseur*, *Blue Rita* and *The Cannibals*. Asked in 1977, just after shooting *Ces sacrées anglaises* for Franco's close friend Richard Bigotini, whether Bigotini's methods were similar to Franco's, Stanford laughed: "Oh, not at all, it's actually quite serious, which is not to say that Franco is not serious. But here there is a script, it's structured." ... Almost as impressive is Lina Romain, whose eventual descent into screaming madness is a tour-de-force as distressing as anything Franco has filmed. Jacqueline Laurent, as Linda's mother, is stuck with a purely reactive role, although she too pulls out all the stops for her big scene. This was her second and last role for Franco, having previously appeared in *Sinner: the Secret Diary of a Nymphomaniac*. Laurent's last screen role was apparently in Alain Payet's *Nathalie, Fugitive from Hell* (1978) alongside Pamela Stanford. The only other important female role goes to Caroline Laferrière playing Lorna's one-time lover, now incarcerated in a poky little private clinic, the dinginess of which seems to me an even greater risk to one's sanity than a dream-hopping lesbian witch. There's only one important male in the film, so thankfully he's well cast: Guy Delorme is excellent as the secretive father, conveying suppressed anxiety and a sort of existential weariness. An established character actor with many credits to his name in French cinema and TV, he appears here in the first of only two Franco excursions (*Blue Rita* being the other). Franco regular Bigotini turns up as a helpful hotel maitre d' who provides Patrick with a gun, and Howard Vernon appears as Lorna's manservant, bashing Patrick round the head with a giant conch (the second sea-creature put to untypical use in the film...). **Music:** Haphazardly sound-edited, with music cues dropping abruptly in and out (and blatantly looped when they don't quite fit), the film's audio design nonetheless amplifies the film's brooding, malevolent atmosphere; it's as though Lorna's evil influence, and the lack of any boundaries protecting the Mariel family, are embodied by the music spilling over the edges of scenes and sprawling where it pleases. Benichou's score is a major ally to Franco's style, with a sweetly meandering acoustic guitar melody alternating with fatalistic flamenco and a poisonous array of electric guitar sounds, from psychedelic strumming to the most malevolent wah-wah.

**Locations:** The film's principal location is La Grande Motte, in the Languedoc region of Southern France. Franco imbues the place with a quasi-Ballardian sci-fi ambience of exotic alien sickness, but it's actually a hugely popular seaside resort, purpose-built in the mid-1960s and celebrated for its distinctive pyramidal buildings by architect Jean Balladur, who took his inspiration from the architecture of Mexican antiquity. The 16-storey Grande Pyramide, finished in 1974, still dominates the skyline (it can be seen in the



film in the final stages of construction, with work still taking place on the upper levels). *Lorna's* interiors were evidently shot in one of the central Ballardur-designed hotels. Their characteristic balcony railings can be spied through the window in Lorna's apartment and through the window of the hotel room where the Mariel family are staying. Note how the bedspread designs in the hotel rooms echo the hotel exterior... Franco shot two more films in the region: *Midnight Party* and the extraordinary *Shining Sex*.

**Connections:** The character played by Catherine Laferrière, psychically addicted to a powerful sorceress, recalls Renfield in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, and the similarly deranged and abandoned Agra (Heidrun Kussin) in *Vampyros Lesbos*... Linda stabs her father in the back of the neck with a long blade when he stoops to kiss her, a corrida-inspired killing which echoes the finale of *Succubus*... When Linda, possessed by Lorna, first enters Marielle's room at the clinic, there are photographs (possibly pages from a magazine) pinned to the wall, including two stills from Lina Romay's nightclub sequence in *Kiss Me Killer*, in which she performs a sexy strip routine with a replica Greek statue of Doryphoros... Franco revisited the notion of a witch passing on her magic powers in the excellent *Macumba sexual* (1981).

**Other versions:** Although the film was apparently first released as *Lorna... l'exorciste*, Comptoir also opted for the somewhat inelegant retitling of *Les Possédées du diable* (*Lorna l'exorciste*), an incredibly battered and brown-hued cinema print of which made it onto French video back in the early 1980s. *Les Possédées du diable* means literally 'The Devil's Possessed Women'. The alternative title *Les Possédées du démon* is unconfirmed, and may actually be a case of mistaken identity: the 1964 film *Delitto allo specchio* by Jean Josipovici and Ambrogio Molteni is also known as both *Sexy Party* and *Les Possédées du démon*; considering that *Lorna... the Exorcist* was called *Sexy Diabolic Story* for its Italian theatrical release and *Les Possédées du diable* for its French re-release, I suspect someone has confused the two films... The Belgian title *Kleine feeksen maken veel heibel* (as seen on the poster) translates as 'Little Vixens Make Big Trouble', which sounds more like a variation on a different 1974 Franco title *Les Grandes Emmerdeuses* ('The Great Bloody Nuisances'). However, the poster clearly credits *Lorna's* Guy Delorme, who does not appear in the other film.

#### Alternative titles

**Les Nonnes en folie** (FR alt. theatrical) *Nuns in Heat*  
**Le sexy goditrici** (IT theatrical) *God's Sexy Women*

#### Production company

**Comptoir Français du Film Production** (Paris)

#### Theatrical distributors

**Comptoir Français du Film Production** (Paris)

#### Timeline

Shooting date	circa May/June	1974
French visa issued	13 January	1975
France	05 March	1975
Italy (Rome)	20 March	1982

#### Theatrical running time

France	102m
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**Cast:** **Lina Romay** (Loulou). **Fred Williams** (Carlos Ribas). **Pamela Stanford** (Coco, aka 'Sister Maria'). **Bigotini** (General Pancho López). **Monica Swinn** ('Mère' Simone, brothel madame). **Olivier Mathot** (the governor). **Ramón Ardid** (Basilio, the general's 2nd-in-command). **Maria Mancini** (another of Simone's girls). **Bigitte Monnin** ('Sister' Fifi, aka 'Juanita Banana'). **Anna Gladyssek** [as 'Anna Gladisek', aka 'Anne Garrec'] ('Sister' Gigi). **Carole [Caroline] Rivière** ('Sister' Mimi). **Lisa Ferrera** [as 'Lisa de Franval'] (one of Simone's girls). **Alfred Baillou** (convent caretaker). *uncredited:* **Willy Braque** (Ramón, a revolutionary). **Nicole Guettard** (older prostitute). **Suzuki** (Asian prostitute).

**Credits:** director: **Jess Franco**. screenplay by **David Khunne**. adaptation & dialogue: **Alain Petit**. director of photography: **Etienne Rosenfeld**. music by **André Benichou**, **Robert de Nesle**. presented by [i.e. producer]: **Robert de Nesle**. location manager: **Victor [de] Costa**. assistant director: **Richard Deconinck** [aka 'Bigotini']. colour by **Eastmancolor**. laboratory: **L.T.C.** (Saint-Cloud). music publisher: **Nicolet-Benichou**. "Our thanks to the Portuguese authorities, Secretary of State, the Municipal Council of Cascais and the manager of the Hotel de Guincho for facilities provided during the shooting of this film." *uncredited:* still photography: **Ramón Ardid**.

**Synopsis:** *Mauritania, 1915. A group of prostitutes led by Loulou and Coco hide a revolutionary, Carlos Ribas, in a brothel run by Madame Simone. A squad of government troops led by the corrupt General Pancho López are hunting for Ribas. The girls are taken prisoner, but they escape to a Carmelite convent where, with the connivance of the only man in the place, an alcoholic dwarf gatekeeper, they assume the identities of nuns. It's not long before General López comes looking for them, but the girls maintain the pretence and seduce the soldiers one by one. López*

## LES CHATOUILLEUSES

**France 1974**

French visa number: 42955

*Original theatrical title in country of origin*

**Les Chatouilleuses** (FR) *The Ticklers*



announces that Carlos Ribas is to be hanged, which causes consternation at the brothel: the young man was their best customer. The working girls decide to kidnap the son of the governor who convicted Ribas, in order to secure his release....

**Production notes:** During the shoot for *Lorna... the Exorcist*, Franco also shot new scenes for *Countess Perverse*, one of which was a humorous sequence in which Lina Romay berates aspiring writer Caroline Rivière for her gloomy obsession with death and murder. One wonders if this reflected Romay's then-current opinion of Franco, because the next three films they made together turn away from the dark side and, like *Célestine, bonne à tout faire*, concentrate on sex in a lighter, more comedic vein. Two of the films were written by Alain Petit in May 1974 while attending the Cannes Film Festival, a process Petit recalled in *The Manacoe Files*: "Jess sent me what I had to re-write day by day, and I had to send him the result the day after. As I spent all day watching films in the Cannes theatres, I had no time left to sleep at night. At that time, my friends used to call me 'the only film critic who goes to screenings with his pillow and his Teddy Bear'. When the screening began, I started snoring ... I wrote *Les Chatouilleuses* and *L'Homme le plus sexy du monde* at the same time..."<sup>21</sup>

**Review:** Another cheeky silly sex comedy, genial and frivolous, *Les Chatouilleuses* is a nunsplotation twin sister to *Célestine An All Round Maid*. Until an English-language version turns up, the charms of the dialogue are lost to non-French speakers, but remember that this is a farce – the comic situations are easy to read without dialogue. The comedy certainly looks corny: it's the sort of film where a man hides in a hooker's wardrobe during a raid, but gives himself away to the authorities when a feather boa makes him sneeze – a gag that's played out three times before Bigotini's corrupt General finally breaks off from screwing Romay to investigate. Woody Allen this ain't. The funniest stand-out sequence is one in which a group of whores, disguised as nuns, conduct a mass under the suspicious gaze of the soldiers. Luckily, the would-be oppressors are a dim-witted bunch who don't even notice when the soliloquy digresses from holy catechism to cod-latin nonsense about clitorises and rectums. Nor does a glimpse of black stockings under Romay's hitched-up surplus ring any alarm bells. Soon the foolish men are completely under the spell of these daughters of perpetual indulgence, at which point the comic rumpy-pumpy that made *Célestine* such a chore gets another run around the paddock.

Judging by the energetic, uninhibited performances, *Les Chatouilleuses* was great fun to make, but sadly that doesn't make it fun to watch. The film ends with the cast driving away in a horse drawn cart waving merrily at the camera, a shot which tells you all you need to know about the raison-d'être of the film and the state of mind of the director when he made it. There's a sense of frolics in the sun, larking about, an antidote perhaps to some of Franco's extremely dark and troubling work at the time. By 1974, he'd been working with Lina Romay for two years: *Les Chatouilleuses*

and *Célestine* see him saying to his newly discovered muse, 'stick around, it's not all doom and gloom!' Franco himself told me that this was his favourite of the comedies he made for Comptoir, so, giving it the benefit of the doubt, maybe its real enticements await sympathetic translation.

**Music:** Latin-American folk music occupies the majority of the running time, although a peculiar piece for synthesiser pops up a couple of times too, showing as cavalier an attitude to historical ambience as the groovy rock songs in *The Demons*. The Italian version *Le sexy goditrici* adds music by André Benichou.

**Locations:** The setting is once again the house and grounds of the Palácio Conde Castro Guimarães in Cascais, Portugal, something of a home from home for Franco in the early 1970s.

**Connections:** Franco's next nunsplotation film is the far more substantial *Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun* (1976).

**Other versions:** Compared to the 97m French video release of *Les Chatouilleuses*, the Italian video version *Le sexy goditrici* plays for a lean 67m, but includes explicit 'beaver shots' directed and inserted by someone else. In 1975 the French magazine *Sex Stars System* drew attention to a second French version, with additional sequences not directed by Franco, and as the magazine was edited by Jean-Pierre Bouyxou, this information probably came from Franco himself.<sup>22</sup> It's possible however that this was just *Le sexy goditrici*, dubbed back into French!

**Problematica:** The actress billed as 'Lisa de Franval' appears in another three Franco films made in Portugal during roughly the same period: in *Le Joueur* she's credited as 'Liza Ferrera', in *Les Grandes Emmerdeuses* as 'Lisa Ferrera' and she appears unbilled in the Italian re-edit of *Juliette 69* entitled *Justine*. All other reference sources conflict in reference both to her real name and her onscreen credit. Some sources consider 'Franval' to be her real surname, however given that she appears only in films shot in Portugal, it seems more likely that her name was 'Ferrera' (or even 'Ferreira'). Given that it appears frequently in the works of de Sade, the name 'Franval' was probably chosen by Jess. For clarity's sake we have chosen to use 'Lisa Ferrera' throughout.

## LE JOUISSEUR

France 1974

French visa number: 42954

Original theatrical title in country of origin

**Le Joueur** (FR) *The Pleasurer*

Alternative titles

**Der Sex Playboy** (GER theatrical)

**Sexy erotic jobb** (IT theatrical)

**L'Homme le plus sexy du monde** (FR alt. title)

*The Sexiest Man in the World*

**Roland, L'Homme le plus sexy du monde** (FR shooting title)

*Production company*

**Comptoir Français du Film Production** (Paris)

*Theatrical distributors*

**Comptoir Français du Film Production** (Paris)

*Timeline*

Shooting date	circa May/June	1974
French visa issued	11 December	1974
France	11 December	1974
Italy (Domodossola, Piedmont)	06 October	1981

*Theatrical running time*

France 120m

*Cast:* **Fred Williams** (Count Roland). **Lina Romay** (Loulou). **Pamela Stanford** (Angela). **Maria Mancini** (the Lapièrres' maid). **Brigitte Monnin** (Barbara Bolt). **Monica Swinn** (Madame Lapièrre). **Liza [Lisa] Ferrera** [aka Lisa de Franval] (Suzanne, Malou's woman). **Olivier Mathot** (Joe Corsia). **Willy Braque** (aide putting damp cloth on Corsia's forehead). **Alfred Baillou** (Turkun) [scenes missing from all extant prints]. **Ramón Ardid** (Bidule). **Vítor Mendes** (Prince Grokumaté). **Suzuki** (Kukuci Kuci). **Bigotini** (Bertrand Malou, the valet). **Lisa Ferrera** (Suzanne). *uncredited:* **Caroline Rivièrre** (Pepita). **Anna Gladyssek** [aka 'Anne Garrec'] (Jeannine, sex shop owner).

*Credits:* director: **Jess Franco**. writer: **Nicole Franco [Guettard]**. director of photography: **Etienne Rosenfeld**. music: **André Benichou**. presented by [i.e. producer]: **Robert de Nesle**. assistant director: **Richard Deconinck** [aka 'Bigotini']. production assistants: **Victor [de] Costa**, **Fernando Meunier**. colour: **Eastmancolor**. laboratory: **L.T.C.** (Saint-Cloud). music publisher: **Nicolet – Benichou**. *uncredited:* dialogue: **Alain Petit**. still photography: **Ramón Ardid**.

**Synopsis:** *Paris; the present.* Count Roland is a bored young nobleman whose sex life is going nowhere. His wife is a porn magnate and sex therapist who travels constantly, pre-occupied with her position as European sales representative for PSA (Pornographic Shops Associated). Her idea of good fucking is drawn from sexual health manuals and a passionless commitment to the Kama Sutra. Her obsession with the correct way to 'do it' turns Roland off. Malou, Roland's sharp-witted valet and best friend, becomes his accomplice in seeking a cure for sexual ennui. Malou arranges for the Count to pose as a valet, allowing him to indulge his sexual peccadilloes. After a variety of adventures with a rich

man and his beautiful daughter, a criminal gang working from a sexy nightclub, and an exhausting tour of duty providing sexual service to rich women, he is mortified to discover that a few of his escapades have been filmed, and are now available on Super-8 in the sex emporiums of the Pigalle. When his wife discovers Roland's diary, in which he describes his sexual adventures, he fears the end of his marriage. Instead, his newfound status as porn-star has an ironic effect: his wife is now able to have sex without sex aids and fantasy literature because the fact that he's now a 'porn star' satisfies her peculiar needs.

**Production notes:** Towards the end of *Le Joueur* we're treated to a tracking shot through Paris's red light district after dark, during which Franco cannot resist a proud zoom into a huge front-of-house display for his 1972 Al Pereira flick *Les Ébranlées* at a flashy-looking theatre called L'Atlantique. Among the other films playing are Dieter von Soden's 1971 softcore flick *Astrologie Sexuelle* (originally called *Wenn die Jungfrau mit dem Stier*, released in France on 29 May 1974), Sergio Bergonzelli's *La provocation sexuelle* (original title *Io Cristiana studentessa degli scandali*, made in 1970 and also released in France on 29 May 1974), Pierre Unia's sex comedy *Les Maîtresses de Vacances* (released in February 1974) and Lucien Hustaix's softcore flick *Les Careseuses* (1973). Another marquee displays a poster for *Un silencieux au bout du canon* which is the French retitling of *McQ* (1974), starring John Wayne, released in France in April 1974. This combined evidence dates the shoot for *Le Joueur* (its Paris-lensed material at least) pretty solidly at the end of May or some time in June 1974.

**Review:** *Le Joueur* (originally to be called *Roland, l'Homme le plus sexy du monde* before producer Robert de Nesle insisted on a typically terse replacement) is yet another Franco sex comedy; an improvement on *Célestine* and *Les Chatouilleuses*, though that isn't saying a lot. It's equally frivolous, and very talky, but at least this time we're in the present day, meaning that we're spared at least some of the farcical cavorting that period costume drama seems to bring out in Franco's thespian troupe.

Much of the story is concerned with that venerable porno fantasy, the man who must satisfy an endless stream of beautiful women. Fortunately there's another dynamic which helps to distinguish the story, inasmuch as it's a rare example of Franco making what is essentially a buddy movie. The friendship between Roland (Fred Williams) and Malou (Bigotini) is swiftly established as something that transcends a formal master-servant relationship. It's not stretching the point to say that while Roland feels he has to 'service' women and bring them pleasure, almost as a duty of manhood, it's only with Malou that he can be himself and relax. In the funniest example of this, Roland returns to his bedroom after a hard day making love to a bevy of demanding women, to find Malou asleep on the bed. Exhausted, Roland flops down beside him, a discarded bra still draped round his neck. Malou sleepily wraps an arm around Roland, who is too tired to care. The two

men snooze together, physically entangled, there concerns about masculine self-image put aside. Male intimacy is rare in Franco's cinema; men are usually solitary, and friendship isn't often a factor. They are usually either monsters, authoritarian stick figures, or fools, and they rarely enjoy each other's company. Consequently, *Le Jouisseur* lets a little fresh air into what can be a stiflingly negative wing of the Franco *château de rêves*.

The last few minutes are the most amusing. As Roland makes love to his wife, having finally aroused her thanks to his burgeoning porn stardom, the lighting changes and a film crew step out from behind curtains and doorways. Someone holds up a clapperboard, stating that this is a project by 'Phallus Films' called 'Le couple le plus sexy du monde'. Leaving the audience to ponder the lesson, Franco defocuses the camera and the movie ends... Yes, it's a heartwarming tale of a marriage saved by porn, a popular trope in the mid-1970s as the mainstream attention enjoyed by films such as *The Devil in Miss Jones*, *Deep Throat* and *Emmanuelle* resulted in magazine think-pieces attempting to analyse the social and moral intricacies of the phenomenon. Franco seems to suggest that modern couples are running porn movies in their heads as they 'do it', and in some ways he's probably right. The implications are ambiguous: is porn an elixir breathing life into a stale marriage, or is the point being made that sex in the modern era is marked by alienation, with role play just the best means of dealing with it? If Barbara can only manage without her sex toys and manuals because her husband is now a porn star, it suggests that he himself has become the ultimate sex toy, a living breathing celebrity dildo.

The appearance of the camera crew at the end of the film serves to remind us what's usually missing from Franco's sex comedies, namely formal experimentation. Nothing in the style, structure or technique of *Célestine* or *Les Chatouilleuses* kicks against the simple rules for the genre and, until the last few minutes, the same goes for *Le Jouisseur*. In his horror films Franco is an iconoclast; in his erotica he's frequently an aesthete. In his sex comedies the stylistic expression is thoroughly mundane, which can make the films arid and uninviting if you're looking for the sleaze-art kick of Franco's best work. In discussing the sex comedies I've tried not to burden them with unreasonable demands and expectations, but inevitably, as someone whose taste in comedy runs fairly black, I find it hard to engage with these light and casually silly films. *Le Jouisseur* offers a few crumbs of satire and contains a few brief spikes of interest.

**Music:** Easily the best thing about *Le Jouisseur* is the score by André Benichou. The titles play to a wonderfully laid-back excursion showcasing jazz-rock licks and a latin beat. Elsewhere, Benichou's fervid solos bear comparison to Carlos Santana or John McLaughlin. Tucked away about half an hour into the film (and recurring several times from there on, most notably over the Pigalle sequence) is a wonderful piece for muted trumpet, xylophone and flanged guitar that suggests where German innovators Faust might have gone if they'd continued in the jazzier vein of their *So Far* LP. (It can also be heard on *Le Miroir obscène*.)

**Locations:** Some interiors are filmed at the Palácio Conde Castro Guimarães, Cascais. The Hotel de Guincho provides the location for Suzuki's nude sunbathing session, spied upon by Bigotini in a helicopter. The seaside town of Estoril in Portugal provides the seafront and casino locations.

**Connections:** Pamela Stanford wears her curly wig from *Lorna... the Exorcist*.

**Other versions:** The French video runs 100 minutes, which would make the theatrical version roughly 105 minutes. In its original form, however, the film was even longer. Alain Petit refers in *The Manacoa Files* to a scene that was cut for length, running an extra fifteen minutes: "The film is around 105 minutes, which for this type of product is excessive, so we will never see the Turkish episode, a sequence in a harem, with Alfred Baillou reigning absolute master over a pack of pretty naked girls..." *Le Jouisseur* has suffered more than most Franco films from a lack of contemporary promotional material; stills, posters, pressbooks are vanishingly rare for this obscure film. Were it not for the Italian poster, under the clumsy title *Sexy erotic jobb*, no artwork for this film would seem to have survived into the present day. (Note: Italian press listings for the film refer to it as *Sexy Erotic Job*; perhaps the poster was a misprint? Sadly no Italian print has surfaced for us to check the onscreen spelling.)

**Problematica:** Various sources add the following uncredited and unconfirmed cast member: Victor de Costa.

## LES GRANDES EMMERDEUSES

France 1974

French visa number: 43300

*Original theatrical title in country of origin*

**Les Grandes Emmerdeuses** (FR) *The Colossal Bloody Nuisances*

*Alternative titles*

**Sexy a go-go** (IT theatrical)

**Kleine feeksen maken veel heibel** (BEL theatrical)

*Little Vixens Make Big Trouble*

*Unconfirmed titles*

**Les Emmerdeuses** (FR alt. theatrical [Encyclocliné])

**Les Joyeuses** [Encyclocliné] *The Merry Ones*

*Production company*

**Comptoir Français du Film production** (Paris)

*Theatrical distributors*

**Comptoir Français du Film production** (Paris)



*Timeline*

Shooting date	circa July/August	1974
French visa issued	26 March	1975
France	26 March	1975
Italy (Genova)	04 March	1981

*Theatrical running time*

France	83m
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**Cast:** Pamela Stanford (Tina). Lina Romay (Pina). Monica Swinn (Kashfi). Bigotini (Bigotini, Interpol Agent 0069). Ramón Ardid (Interpol Agent Ramón Pérez). Lisa Ferrera [as 'Lisa Franval'] (Lola aka 'Pat Martin'). Willy Braque (Insurance Agent posing as Radeck). *uncredited:* Vitor Mendes (Mr. Radeck). Suzuki [as 'Susuki'] (Radeck's girlfriend). Jess Franco (Martin la Moumoute of Interpol).

**Credits:** director: Jess Franco. screenplay, adaptation & dialogue: David Khunne. director of photography: Etienne Rosenfeld. editor: Louis Soulanes. music: André Benichou. presented by [i.e. producer]: Robert de Nesle. production manager: Jacques Garcia. production secretary: Fernande Meunier. assistant director: Richard Deconinck [aka 'Bigotini']. trainee director: Jacques Nicolet. music production: André Benichou, Jacques Nicolet. trainee editor: Agnès Picaud. sound recordist: Jean-Claude Marchetti. colour: Eastmancolor. laboratory: Neyrac Films. *uncredited:* still photography: Ramón Ardid.

**Synopsis:** Pina and Tina are two ex-strippers and con-artists who say they now work for Interpol. In flashback we discover how this happened. In Antofagasta, Chile, Pina and Tina, posing as an individual using the name 'The Golden Panther', pick up a man called Carmen and force him at gunpoint to reveal the whereabouts of a cache of jewels he has stolen from a millionaire called Radeck. He tells them they are in the hands of someone called Kashfi. The girls telephone Radeck as 'The Golden Panther' and claim to have the jewels, which they offer to sell back to him for \$200,000. Meanwhile, two Interpol agents, Agent Pérez and Agent Bigotini (number 0069), are watching their every move. The girls head for Portugal and set up a meeting with Kashfi, who turns out to be a woman. Tina and Kashfi have sex; just as Kashfi is about to use a strap-on dildo on Tina, Pina arrives and knocks her out cold. Tina is annoyed, but soon cheers up when they discover the diamonds are hidden inside the strap-on. With the jewels concealed in their vaginas they head for Portugal, where they plan to meet Radeck and conclude the deal. However, Radeck has offered \$100,000 to a hit-woman called Lola (aka 'Pat Martin') if she can trap 'The Golden Panther' and recover the diamonds. Radeck's Asian assistant takes Lola upstairs to see a hulking, facially deformed man called 'The Monster of Duranstein' whom she keeps locked up; she tells Lola he is dangerous to most people but not to her, as he's her brother. Oblivious of Radeck's counter-plan, Pina and Tina perform their nightclub act. In the audience, unaware of each other,

are Lola and the two Interpol agents. Wearing Arabic costumes, Pina and Tina have a drink with the Interpol men. Tina goes back to their hotel room while Pina seduces Lola, surreptitiously removing the gun that the assassin wears strapped to her leg. However, Lola hypnotises Pina and makes her a slave. Tina turns up with a gun and bashes Lola over the head, only to find that Pina is still under her influence and merely repeats everything she says. The next day, Agents Pérez and Bigotini wake up with bad hangovers to discover that Tina has gone. They get a phone call (from Tina, disguising her voice) telling them the location of the 'Golden Panther'. Arriving at the specified location they instead find Lola, who is just regaining consciousness. They try to arrest her but she overpowers them and escapes. Tina and Pina perform their act again, and wait for Radeck to turn up at the nightclub as arranged. A sinister man falsely claiming to be Radeck arrives and orders a bottle of Dom Pérignon. The girls go back to his house with him. Tina is unsure if he really is Radeck, but Pina says if he has the money then fair enough. The man asks which of them is the Golden Panther; they ask him if he is Radeck. When he says yes, they go to the bathroom and extract the diamonds from each others' vaginas, putting them into an empty cigarette packet which they give to the man. He examines the diamonds and approves them, thanking them for their help. They ask for the money and he says he is not Radeck but an insurance agent. Tina pulls a gun on him but he overpowers her. The three of them struggle until Lola turns up with a gun, knocking the two girls out. Bigotini and Pérez turn up and hold them at gunpoint, taking the diamonds from the insurance agent. Lola, however, believes that the Interpol men are really associates of the Golden Panther and that the girls still know the location of the diamonds. She hauls Pina off to Radeck's castle in Portugal and tortures her to make her reveal where the diamonds are hidden. Radeck watches, laughing. He fetches the Duranstein Monster and Lola threatens to turn it loose on Pina if she doesn't spill the beans. Tina, in her cat disguise, arrives at the castle and attempts to scale the walls. Pérez and Bigotini also turn up. However, Pina is doing alright without assistance; she turns the tables, seducing the monster and having wild sex with him. The monster attacks and kills his sister, Lola and Radeck, and is about to carry Pina away when Tina arrives and shoots him. "A shame," says Pina: "He was cute." The two cops arrive: "At last... nothing!" announces Bigotini. They all laugh. "We became great friends," Tina's voice over tells us, "And thanks to them we became agents of the law".

**Review:** *Les Grandes Emmerdeuses* is an almost indescribable oddity that has to be seen to be believed. It's one of those loose, playful films in which you're invited to watch Franco and his cast simply daydream a movie into existence, on the most threadbare of budgets, with the minimum of preparation. We see Jess and Lina Romay and a few regular compadrés (Pamela Stanford, Monica Swinn, Bigotini, Ramón Ardid) wandering between hotel rooms and seaside locations in the middle of the swinging seventies, fucking and chatting and fooling around, set to a wonderful jazz-rock soundtrack by 1974's top of the Franco pops, André Benichou. Narrative tropes derived from crime and espionage

potboilers jostle with softcore pornography and horror, conveyed with freewheeling surrealism. Abstract and blissful, far-out and funny, this is Franco Seventies-style.

Jess Franco's films often make you feel as though you're astral-travelling, and I don't just mean the overtly psychedelic ones. I'm thinking of the unsung titles, the unhinged Thursday-afternoon shooting-any-old-thing ones, weird little obscurities hiding between the 'notorious' movies. *Les Grandes Emmerdeuses* is psychedelic in a unique ineffable way; watching it is like dangling your lazy thoughts over the edge of a hotel bed on a hot summer evening and gazing at the starry sky while Lina Romay and Pamela Stanford muck around, pretending to be criminal lesbian extortionists, or something of the sort. Pamela wears a frankly insane carnival cat mask and an all-in-one leopardskin stretch outfit, looking as though she's stepped straight out of an Italian fumetti ... A light breeze carries the elusive bouquet of a faraway year ... 1974, the year of Terry Jacks' 'Seasons in the Sun', Charles Aznavour's 'She', Barry White's 'You're My First, My Last, My Everything' ... We're somewhere in Portugal, on the coast, with a sense of the evening heat soaking through the celluloid. The steamy, dreamy verité sensation is amplified by the opening scene in which Lina and Pamela talk directly to camera before showing off their pussies. Beat that, Jean-Luc Godard. Monica Swinn turns up as a Marcuse-spouting intellectual lesbian with stolen diamonds hidden in her strap-on, and there are numerous softcore clinches with the emphasis firmly girl-on-girl (Romay and Stanford enjoy frequent fondlings and frottages together). Just when you're getting bored in this sweltering hotel-nowhere, just as the sex scenes begin to drag and your spirit feels like drifting away to look for the pool or the bar, the film mutates, in that curious, narcotic fashion that Franco does so well, from a dreamy crime romp into a horror film, with torture by soldering iron, and the surprise appearance of some kind of monster. This 'monstre de Duranstein' tries to rape Lina Romay, but the assault doesn't quite go to plan - the creature loses control of the situation and ends up getting humped by Lina instead. Suddenly we're racing pell-mell to the climax - the monster turns upon the villain (Vitor Mendes, playing another of Franco's evil Radecks), who responds by trying to crush it with his enormous belly. The monster thumps him on top of his balding head, a cartoon-style riposte that sums up the loopy derangement of the film, with everyone appearing to contribute random crazy ideas. Of course the girls get the last laugh, and we return to the same hotel room we saw at the start of the film, from where Lina and Pamela wave goodbye... "Cut, voyeur!" grins Pamela Stanford to the camera, as we leave them to journey on through the night...

*Les Grandes Emmerdeuses* ("The Big Bloody Nuisances") may not be in the same league as *Virgin among the Living Dead* or *Lorna... the Exorcist*, and it's certainly not trying to make you think, but it's one of my all-time favourite Franco films and seems to convey the underlying ethos of his work perfectly. It's an example of Franco simply cranking the camera and letting go with his imagination,

determined that as much as possible of life should be spent making a movie. He's telling a story here almost involuntarily, just riffing on the sheer physical pleasure of cinema: living it and breathing it and getting away with it. You watch a movie like this and wish that your own 'lazy' days could be so productive and magical. Lina's in a playful mood, the champagne flows, the summer's warm, and the air is filled with the prospect of sex. Dreamy and crazy in that insidious Franco way, *Les Grandes Emmerdeuses* is another surreptitious little marvel in his labyrinthine filmography.

**Franco on screen:** A small but amusing role for Franco, playing a foul-tempered Interpol boss who yells furiously at the hapless secret agents played by Bigotini and Ramón Ardid.

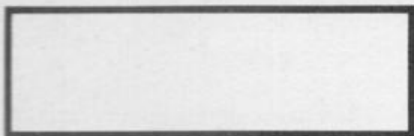
**Music:** If you love André Benichou's themes from *Les Gloutonnes* and *Le Miroir obscène* then you need to see this film, as the same basic tunes are re-used and re-recorded in numerous arrangements. We hear a version of the *Miroir obscène* riff (electric guitar, bass, drums and Hammond organ) which turns into an extensive workout that sounds uncannily like something Dutch prog-rockers Focus might have created at the time (Benichou's soloing recalls a cross between Focus's Jan Akkerman and Mexican guitar legend Carlos Santana). An uptempo Spanish guitar version can be heard as Pina seduces a man in a hotel room. Vitor Mendes plays another version on the piano. The theme is also re-scored for electric guitar, piano, bass and vibes, and a smoky bar-room jazz piano adds yet another variation. Also featured prominently is the effortlessly psychedelic jazz-rock number previously heard in the Paris nightlife scene from *Le Jouisseur*. The credits, however, unspool to a jaunty new Benichou piece for rhythm guitar and piano.

**Locations:** Shot chiefly in the Portuguese seaside town of Estoril. Radeck's beach-side castle, where the Duranstein monster attacks Tina, is the Praia do Tamariz in Estoril. Some of the interiors were filmed, as so often, at the Palácio Conde Castro Guimarães, Cascais. The large stone mansion on the coastline visible in the background during the sequence in which Tina has her rendezvous with Kashfi, is the Duque de Palmela Palace in Estoril.

**Connections:** The title may have been inspired by *L'Emmerdeur* ('The Troublemaker'), a comedy by Edouard Molinaro starring Lino Ventura and Jacques Brel, released in September 1973.

**Other versions:** This allegedly played French sex cinemas as both *Les Emmerdeuses* and *Les Grandes Emmerdeuses*, but the only home entertainment version anywhere in the world is the French video release from the early 1980s, which uses the longer title. Some sources have listed a third variant, *Les Petites vicieuses font...* *Les Grandes Emmerdeuses*. This, however, is based on a misapprehension of the Belgian poster, in which the actual title *Les Grandes Emmerdeuses* is preceded by a strap-line reading "*Les petites vicieuses font...*" (roughly translated, "The little ones are vicious...") The film is not to be confused with *Les Emmerdeuses*, a 2009 French porno film directed by Fabien Lafait.

**Problematica:** IMDb currently lists actor Fred Williams, who does not in fact appear.



# SEXY a GO~GO

con Lina Romay - Pamela Stanford - Willy Braque  
sceneggiatura di David Khouri - musica di Jacques Nicolet - regia di Clifford Brown  
colore





EUROCINÉ  
presents

Eurociné  
présente

YDEX  
EUROCINÉ  
présentent

EUROCINÉ  
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## EUROCINÉ - THE BUSINESS OF EURO-BIS

by Julian Grainger

Jess Franco and Eurociné will always be associated with each other. This is as much a matter of timing as artistic synthesis. In the early 1980s as VCRs began their inexorable invasion of almost every home in northern America and the UK, and their slower but equally unstoppable penetration into homes everywhere else, the thirst for films on videotape was immense. Eurociné weren't slow off the mark, and nascent cinéastes (at least those with more Catholic tastes) were presented with bizarre titles (*The Sadist of Notre Dame*, *Oasis of the Zombies*) and deliciously lurid cover artwork, often reminiscent of 1960s American horror comics. Watching the Eurociné films themselves was often a confusing and frustrating experience: labyrinthine plots that leave one stuck in the maze, scenes that seem to bear no connection to adjacent footage, colour, lighting and image quality varying wildly from moment to moment, badly-lit and poorly-dressed interior sets and the extended use of footage from other Eurociné productions and acquisitions. A local copse must pass for an entire jungle, a few metres of cave wall for the Temple of the Sun Goddess, a small, rather tatty office for a doctor's surgery, a police station or a modelling studio.

And how were we to realise that these Eurociné titles - the only versions we knew about - were in some cases travesties of the film-maker's original intentions? Or that they were older films with an extra ten or twenty minutes of footage grafted on? Eurociné didn't make it easy for us: in almost every case the few credits evident on-screen consist of peculiar-looking pseudonyms, some of which refer to more than one real person; and where films were purchased from third parties for French distribution, the original credits were replaced by Eurociné's trademark tangle.

The advent of home video further complicated matters for the diligent researcher, as it gave Eurociné the chance to re-title their films all over again. Recent Blu-ray releases reveal yet more re-titlings, plus, in some cases, new sets of video-generated credits - the content of which has clearly been sourced from the IMDb. It is thanks to the extraordinary work of such ciné-scholars as Christophe Bier, Pete Tombs, Lucas Balbo and Laurent Aknin that many of Eurociné's mysteries have been solved; much of the content of this short entry is based on their work.<sup>1</sup>

One of France's oldest surviving film production and distribution companies, the entity we now know as Eurociné began life as

BAP Films, founded by Charles BAttesti and Robert Peguy in 1937. Marius Lesoeur (1910-2003)<sup>2</sup> was a regional independent producer who had turned his experiences as a former fairground showman into a business (Studios Mobiles de France) providing electrical equipment to location film units. Lesoeur moved further into film production during the 1940s and his first official credit as producer, *Les Vagabonds du Rêve* (Charles Félix Tavano), came in 1949 via Lesoeur's own Paris Nice Productions. As Christophe Bier points out, there were a significant number of small French producers and distributors whose releases never made it to Paris and were consequently ignored by the mainstream press. For much of the 1950s Lesoeur worked as an independent producer, as well as working as manager of production company SoPaDeC. He joined BAP Films in 1957 and subsequently bought out Battesti and Peguy to create Eurociné in 1958.

Lesoeur had been forging links with foreign producers since the mid-1950s, having already worked with such Spanish producers as Miguel Mezquiritz (*La melodía misteriosa* in 1956; *Delincuentes* in 1957) and the prolific Barcelona-based Ignacio F. Iquino (1958's *Cuatro en la frontera*) before teaming up with Sergio Newman's company Hispamer for Franco's *La reina del Tabarín* and *Vampiresas 1930*. Eurociné seems to fall between two standard film-financing structures: the standard post-production buy-out of foreign rights, and the participation in official co-productions triggering government subsidies, tax-breaks and the like. Eurociné's standard deal was to supply (and bear the cost of) two French actors and the music score in return for the French rights. (The company's contracts must have been either extremely poor or very, very good since Eurociné retained the rights to re-sell these films with the advent of each new home-viewing format.) Lesoeur also participated with Spanish producer Eduardo Manzanos Brochero and his film cooperative Copercines in the creation of a standing frontier town set built at Hoyo de Manzanares (located some 25 miles from Madrid) which was nicknamed 'Golden City'. Such Eurociné 'co-productions' as Joaquín Romero Marchent's aka *The Shadow of Zorro* (1962, *Cabalgando hacia la muerte*) and Franco's *El Llanero* (1963, aka *Le Jaguar*) were filmed there. Very much a minor 'co-producer' if such a term can be used, Eurociné's name was seldom to be found on the original Spanish or Italian films they had assisted but it covered their own release versions (prints,



posters and publicity materials) like a rash. In only a few cases did Eurociné participate in official co-productions and this happened more frequently in the mid-1970s with such titles as *Une vierge pour St Tropez* (1975, with Italy) and *Train special pour Hitler* (1976, with Spain). Lesoeur also re-kindled old contacts such as Miguel Mezquiriz to participate in 1970's *Orloff against the Invisible Man* and Juan Fortuny's *Crimson* (1973, aka *Las ratas no duermen de noche / L'Homme à la tête coupée*). Apart from Spain and Italy, Lesoeur also had a reliable European neighbour in Belgium as a buyer of his product - even though some titles apparently needed to be changed for local consumption (Franco's *Mais qui donc a violé Linda?* became *La Maison des Pécheresses* for example). This gave rise to a number of French-Belgian co-productions, mostly made with Brux Inter (or Brux International) Film of Brussels but occasionally with other entities such as Cetelci (notably 1974's *Exorcism*). Brux was founded by Belgian lawyer Jean Quérut and his son Pierre (who can be seen as the police inspector in *Female Vampire*) and while most of Brux's productions were co-productions with Eurociné, they made at least one by themselves, Jack Guy's *Jailbait* (1975, aka *Les Baiseuses*).

Lesoeur's Fifties and Sixties co-productions tended to be part of then-popular genres: westerns, outdoors adventure films, thrillers, musicals, comedies, crime and horror titles. On the other hand, much of Eurociné's own work concentrated on just one genre: erotica. From 1968 onwards this would be Eurociné's prime concern, although other genres - especially horror and action - continued to feature strongly. Eurociné's longevity can be partly attributed to its structure, which is very much a family affair: Marius ceded control of the company to his son Daniel Lesoeur in the mid-1980s and Daniel's wife Ilona Kunesova has a credit on virtually every Eurociné film as a script supervisor and is also a writer and 'Development Executive'. Daniel and Ilona's son Thomas Lesoeur has worked as 'International President of Sales' and daughter Anouchka appeared in a handful of Eurociné horror and sex films as a child actress filmed circa 1980-81 (*La Maison Tellier*, *Zombies' Lake*, *Cannibals*). Similarly the company has used the same group of actors (Howard Vernon, Olivier Mathot, Monica Swinn, Pamela Stanford, Yul Sanders, Sylvia Solar), directors (Franco, Pierre Chevalier, Jean Rollin) and technicians (composer Daniel J. White, cinematographer Alain Hardy) over and again.

In the mid- to late-1980s, Eurociné attempted to up its game by producing more expensive action films for the voracious video market. While Chevalier's *Panther Squad* and Andrea Bianchi's *Angel of Death* and *Mania* are virtually unwatchable, Franco's three contributions (*Dark Mission*, *Esmeralda Bay* and *Fall of the*

*Eagles*) were well-cast and well-made, with the latter clearly an attempt at a serious drama addressing that great French taboo: the occupation. Jess Franco made 30-plus productions with Eurociné, including some of his best-known - and most notorious - titles: *The Awful Dr. Orloff* and *Dr. Orloff's Monster*, *Eugenie*, *Women behind Bars* and *The Devil Hunter* to name a few. Some seem to represent Franco's original intentions (*Eugenie*), others contained material shot by different directors (*A Virgin among the Living Dead; Exorcism*), while in a few cases he returned to add new material himself in an attempt to appease Lesoeur and create something perhaps less personal but more saleable (*The Hot Nights of Linda*).

In some ways, Eurociné is similar to another great independent producing/distributing company; Sam Sherman and Al Adamson's New York-based Independent-International Pictures Corp. Adamson's father Victor Adamson (aka Denver Dixon) was a film-maker and actor in silent westerns whose son followed him into the business. Sherman and co. were always buying in foreign pictures and seeking to 'improve' them by adding new scenes in spite of the extra expense this must have incurred. They tinkered endlessly with their own productions, re-titling them many times and on at least one occasion adding no fewer than three sets of new footage to the original film (*Echo of Terror* became *Psycho a Go-Go* which became *Fiend with the Electronic Brain* which became *Blood of Ghastly Horror*, which was re-titled *Man with the Synthetic Brain*). The parallels with Eurociné are striking.

It's hard not to feel that with Marius gone and Daniel much more the modern businessman, with eyes fixed squarely on the balance sheet, some of the magic (and competence) has gone. Although Daniel can still be found most years at the Cannes film market, *Les Amazons du temple d'or* was the last Eurociné film to achieve a wide release in French cinemas.<sup>3</sup>

In spite of Eurociné's many and evident failings, for some of us there is a strong attraction to such organisations. They shouldn't really survive, given the quality of much of their output, but somehow or other they keep going while far bigger organisations shine more brightly but quickly fade away (Bye-bye Blockbuster...). The films may be badly paced and edited by someone who appears to have learned their editing skills on Twitter, but they can also be funny, scary, sexy and thrilling - jaw-dropping for any variety of reasons. On rare occasions they can even be surprisingly delicate. It's tremendous fun to watch favourite ciné-bis actors looking mildly surprised or uncomfortable as they try to spout their lines and there's little more entertaining than watching a valiant but ultimately futile attempt by five bikini-clad women with 80s haircuts to impersonate an entire tribe of feral, over-sexed Amazons.

#### Tenemos 18 años

1. *ABC Madrid*, 28 February 1959.
2. Luis García Berlanga obituary by Nick Caistor, *The Guardian*, 14 November 2010.
3. Interview by Álex Mendibil, 30 October 2009, published on the website 'Franconomicon'.
4. *ibid.*
5. *ABC Andalucía*, 30 June 1961.

#### Labios rojos

1. Carlos Aguilar: *Jesús Franco: El Sexo del Horror*.
2. *ABC Andalucía*, 6 December 1960.
3. Kevin Burton Smith writes about these and other stories at <http://www.thrillingdetective.com/mcdade.html>
4. *ABC Andalucía*, 2 March 1963.

#### Reina del Tabarín

1. *ABC Madrid*, 15 November 1960.
2. *ibid.*
3. *ABC Andalucía*, 21 August 1961.
4. *El Mundo Deportivo*, 19 August 1961.

#### Vampiresas 1930

1. "Seville comes out for the artist Mikaela, who is attending the premiere of the film *La reina del Tabarín*; she will soon return to Madrid to act in the movie *Vampiresas 1930*, with Yves Massard" - *La Vanguardia*, 24 November 1960.
2. "Fans continue to lay siege at the studio where [Mikaela] has been shooting *Vampiresas 1930*" - *La Vanguardia*, 18 February 1961.
3. *El Mundo Deportivo*, 4 March 1961.
4. *ABC Andalucía*, 30 September 1961.
5. *ibid.*
6. *ABC Madrid*, 9 March 1962.
7. *La Vanguardia*, 4 July 1962.
8. *El Mundo Deportivo*, 23 October 1961.

#### The Awful Dr. Orloff

1. A Mexican version of the story had already been filmed in 1954 by Alfredo B. Crevenna as *La rebelión de los colgados*.
2. Jess Franco interviewed by Álex Mendibil, 30 October 2009, published on the website 'Franconomicon'.
3. Carlos Aguilar: *Jesús Franco: El Sexo del Horror*.
4. Interview by Álex Mendibil, 30 October 2009, published on the website 'Franconomicon'.
5. To Paul Spagnuolo, *Splatter Container*, April 2007.
6. Reported in the article "Probable reaparición de Garay y Koscis" in *El Mundo Deportivo*, 17 March 1962.
7. Jess Franco interviewed by Gian Luca Castoldi in *Amarcord*, Vol.2 No.7, March-April 1997.
8. Thanks to Mirek Lipinski and his website 'Fantaterror', for news of three of these 8mm reels, and Douglas Meltzer at '8mm Forum' for posting a picture of 'The Body Snatchers'.
9. *ABC Andalucía*, 1 December 1962.
10. *ABC Madrid*, 16 May 1962.
11. *El Mundo Deportivo*, 11 March 1962.
12. *Monthly Film Bulletin*, 1 June 1963.

#### La muerte silba un blues

1. "Odiel Información de Huelva" 8 April 1962.

2. *La Vanguardia*, 4 August 1964.

3. *ABC Andalucía*, 5 July 1964.

#### The Sadistic Baron von Klaus

1. Gogo Robins interviewed in *ABC Madrid*, 15 December 1962.
2. *ibid.*
3. *Time Magazine*, 11 August 1947.
4. *ABC Andalucía*, 26 May 1964.

#### Riffi en la ciudad (Vous souvenez vous de Paco?)

1. *El Mundo Deportivo*, 3 June 1963.
2. Not to be confused with Le Grand Prix du Roman, a more mainstream literary prize.
3. *ABC Andalucía*, 2 March 1966.

#### El Llanero

1. John Farrow's *John Paul Jones* (1959) featured the first screen appearance by a handsome young actor named Antonio Mayans, eventually to appear in several 1970s Franco films and become his most trusted ally, onscreen and off, during the 1980s and beyond.
2. *Weekly Variety* (2 October, 1963, page 19: 'Spain's Bargain-Basement Westerns; British Started It There in 1958' by Hank Werba).
3. *Cinéma Culte Européen Volume 1: Eurociné* by Laurent Aknin, Lucas Balbo and Christophe Bier (1999).
4. The character of The Lone Ranger first appeared in a 1933 radio series of the same name, and later spawned books, comics, film serials, features, and a long-running television series. In the latter, the Lone Ranger is a former Texas Ranger who is assisted by Tonto, a Mohawk from the Six Nations Indian Reserve in Canada - proving, one must say, that The Lone Ranger wasn't really so 'lone' after all. Zorro, another American invention, is set in Los Angeles during Spanish rule, and the hero's true identity is don Diego de la Vega, a Californian nobleman.
5. *ABC Andalucía*, 17 May 1964.

#### Dr. Orloff's Monster

1. *La Vanguardia*, 26 January 1964.
2. In *Cinéma Culte Européen Volume 1: Eurociné*, Christophe Bier says there was a screening in France as early as 15 January 1964; this conflicts with the interview given by Perla Cristal in *La Vanguardia*, in which she says that shooting started on 28 January 1964.
3. From an obituary notice by Alvaro Gutierrez on the website of "Interesarte", 15 March 2012: <http://www.interesarte.com/cine/noticias/nos-deja-el-sinverguenza-por-excelencia/>
4. *La Vanguardia*, 25 February 1965.
5. *ABC Andalucía*, 2 October 1966.
6. *El Mundo Deportivo*, 22 February 1965.
7. *La Stampa*, 10 August 1966.

#### Welles, Shakespeare, Stevenson & Franco

1. see Juan Cobos on Orson Welles's "When Are You Going To Finish Don Quixote?" (25 September, 2008) from <http://www.wellesnet.com/juan-cobos-on-orson-welles-when-are-you-going-to-finish-don-quixote/> (retrieved 24 March 2014)
2. see 'Additions to Orson Welles collection at University of Michigan open to scholars' by Ray Kelly (24 September, 2012) from <http://www.wellesnet.com/additions-to-orson-welles-collection-at-university-of-michigan-soon-to-be-open-to-scholars/> (retrieved 24 March 2014)
3. *Variety* 23 December 1964, p.2, 15 ('Orson Welles Borrows From Bard, But Falstaff May Be Like Tom Jones; 'Chimes at Midnight'



Under Wraps' by Hank Werba).

4. *The Good, the Bad and Dolce Vita* by Mickey Knox, pp.221-229 ('1964 Rome-Spain'). Nation Books (New York) 2004.

5. *Campanadas a medianoche in Orson Welles en acción* by Jean-Pierre Berthomé, François Thomas, p.256. Ediciones Akal, S.A. (Madrid) 2007.

6. *Variety* 23 December 1964, p.15 ('Orson Welles Borrows...' *ibid*).

7. *Variety* 12 January 1965, p.4 ('Chimes' Silenced: Orson Welles III').

8. *Variety* 23 December 1964, p.15 ('Orson Welles Borrows...' *ibid*).

9. *ABC* 5 February 1965, p.14

10. *Variety* 12 January 1965, p.4 ('Chimes' Silenced...' *ibid*).

11. Harry Alan Towers interviewed by the author in 2008.

12. *Variety* 8 December 1965, p.76 (Literati: 'Spain's New Film Mag').

#### **The Diabolical Dr. Z**

1. *La Vanguardia*, 29 May 1965.

2. Carlos Aguilar, in his book *Jesús Franco: El sexo del horror*, says that shooting took place from 3 May to 19 June 1965, which ties in with the *Daily Mail* headline; perhaps the press announcement was referring to filming at a specific location?

3. Jess Franco quoted by Alain Petit in a review of *The Diabolical Dr. Z* in *The Manacoe Files*.

4. *El Mundo Deportivo*, 17 November 1966.

5. *ABC Madrid*, 16 August 1966.

6. *ABC Andalucía*, 25 July 1967.

#### **Attack of the Robots**

1. *La Vanguardia*, 14 December 1965.

2. *Variety*, 24 November 1965.

3. *Girls international* #3, Spring 1966.

4. From a review by James Travers at the website *filmsdefrance.com* of *Cet homme est dangereux* (1953).

5. *ABC Madrid*, 2 August 1966.

6. *El Mundo Deportivo*, 12 January 1967.

7. *La Vanguardia*, 13 January 1967.

#### **Golden Horn**

1. *La Vanguardia*, 29 June 1966.

2. *La Vanguardia*, 10 July 1966.

3. *Milliyet*, Sayfa 6, Sanat Eglence, 9 August 1966.

4. With thanks to Carlos Aguilar's book *Jesús Franco: El Sexo del Horror* for information about the financial difficulties of *Golden Horn*.

5. *La Vanguardia*, 23 May 1968.

6. *El Mundo Deportivo*, 25 May 1968.

#### **Lucky the Inscrutable**

1. *ABC Andalucía*, 17 December 1967.

#### **Succubus**

1. Interview by Álex Mendibil, 30 October 2009, published on the website 'Franconomicon'.

2. Interview with Jess Franco by Kevin Collins, 3 March 1996, printed in *European Trash Cinema Special* #1.

3. From an essay entitled 'The Truth About the Necronomicon' by Donald Tyson: <http://web.archive.org/web/20090129203225/http://donalddyson.com/nomicon.html>

4. The quotes from Goethe are as follows: 1. "Spider's foot and paunch of toad/And wings the wight doth grow him!/True, a beastie 'twill not be/But yet a little poem." 2. "Short step here and high leap there/Through honey-dew and sweetness;/Yet you'll soar not through the air,/With all your tripping fleetness." 3. "Is that not mummings' mocking play?/Shall I trust to my vision?/Fair god Oberon today/Is here on exhibition?" 4. "Claws or tail I do not see/And yet, beyond a cavi!,/Just like "The Gods of Greece" is he/Likewise a very

devil." 5. "Yet, young and tender as you are,/I hope that you will rot here."

5. *New York Times*, 26 April 1969.

6. *Chicago Sun Times*, 20 August 1969.

#### **Sadisterotica**

1. *La Vanguardia*, 16 September 1967.

2. *La Vanguardia*, 30 May 1968.

3. *La Vanguardia*, 13 April 1969.

4. *ABC Andalucía*, 23 August 1969.

#### **Kiss Me Monster**

1. *ABC Andalucía*, 13 March 1970.

2. *ABC Madrid*, 10 September 1970.

#### **Mr. Towers, Mr. Unger & Mr. Previn**

1. see Mariella Novotny - <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/JFKnovotny.htm> (retrieved 6 August 2013).

2. see Harry Alan Towers and Mariella Novotny by John Simkin - <http://educationforum.ipbhost.com/index.php?showtopic=13877> (retrieved 6 August 2013).

3. *ibid*.

4. Landau and Unger also purchased several art cinemas in Gotham (NYC) and would remain close friends until Unger's death in 1981.

5. *Variety* 23 March 1966, p.3 & 19 ('Seven Arts' Fresh Momentum')

6. *Variety* 19 September 1969, p.1 & 6 ('Oliver Unger Urges Even 'Some Sacrifices' To Assure Success of 21 Releases).

7. *Variety* 15 October 1969, p.10 ('Another CU Production Slips Out On Its Assay').

8. from <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200910/ldselect/ldcomuni/37/3705.htm> (retrieved 1 August 2013).

9. *Variety* 8 July 1970, p.3 ('Unger, Goldman Commonwealth Exit; Uncertified Loss Of \$61,000,000').

#### **The Blood of Fu Manchu**

1. Robert Monell, <http://cinemadrome.yuku.com/topic/706> ("One of the actors who was employed by Towers told me the money was delivered onto the set in bags guarded by heavily armed men. Liquidity was his goal.").

2. *ABC Madrid*, 27 February 1970.

3. *La Vanguardia*, 19 March 1970.

#### **The Girl from Rio**

1. *Nude in Mink* [aka *The Sins of Sumuru*] by Sax Rohmer, p.32. New York: Fawcett - Gold Medal Original (1950).

2. Interviewed for the Blue Underground DVD release.

3. *The Slaves of Sumuru* by Sax Rohmer, p.40. Published by Jenkins (London), 1952.

4. In his later years, Sanders became depressed owing to a stroke and the onset of dementia. One day, he checked into a hotel near Barcelona; he was found dead two days later (25 April 1972) alongside five empty bottles of barbiturates and his now widely quoted suicide note.

5. *La Vanguardia*, 22 March 1972.

6. *ABC Andalucía*, 16 July 1972.

#### **99 Women**

1. Interview with Jess Franco by Kevin Collins, 3 March 1996, printed in *European Trash Cinema Special* #1.

2. *Variety*, 5 February 1969.

3. A.H. Weiler, *New York Times*, 22 May 1969.

#### **Justine**

1. Harry Alan Towers, from the Blue Underground DVD of *Justine*.

2. 'La Doble Version' by Josep Melia *ABC Madrid* 23 February 1973. ("Creo que uno de los casos más singulares fue la versión de la 'Justina', de Sade, que hizo Jesús Franco en el barrio gótico de Barcelona y que llevó a la Dirección General de Espectáculos a instruir un expediente sancionados.")

3. *Monthly Film Bulletin*, May 1972.
4. Carlos Aguilar's *Jesús Franco: el sexo del horror*.
5. Franco interview for the Blue Underground DVD of *Justine*.
6. The Marquis de Sade, *Justine*, p505, "The Complete Justine", Grove Press, 1965.
7. The words are a paraphrase of numerous such speeches on the topic of virtue's travails in The Marquis de Sade's *Justine*.
8. Franco interview by Alain Petit in *The Manacoa Files*.
9. Interview with Franco for the Blue Underground DVD of *Justine*.
10. Even *La Nouvelle Justine* was not the last word. Michel Delon's Bibliothèque de la Pléiade edition ("Oeuvres Vol. 2"), which gathers together all three versions in one massive set, notes that a copy of *La Nouvelle Justine* seized by police in 1801 was covered in authorial annotations which, as Delon puts it, suggests, "*une nouvelle Nouvelle Justine, comme si ce texte était infiniment voué à la réécriture.*"
11. "Justine, ou les Malheurs de la Vertu" was translated into English for Grove Press by Austryn Wainhouse in 1965.
12. From Sade's *La Nouvelle Justine* - the English translation can be found in *Juliette*, published by Grove Press/Atlantic Monthly Press (1st Complete American Edition), 31 December 1968: p.1190-1191.

#### **The Castle of Fu Manchu**

1. Balcázar Producciones Cinematográficas: *Más allá de Esplugas City* by Rafael de España and Salvador Juan i Babot.
2. Robert L. Jerome in *Cinefantastique*, 1974.

#### **Venus in Furs**

1. It's like the fate that befell Captain Beefheart's 1968 album *Strictly Personal*, which Beefheart completed and left with producer Bob Krasnow for what was supposed to be minor post-production, only to discover a few weeks later that Krasnow had swamped the entire album with 'psychedelic' phasing effects.
2. Bruno Mattei, Italian director of *The Other Hell* and *Zombie Creeping Flesh*, began his career as an editor during the 1960s.
3. From "The Jess Franco Files (3): Paroxysmus (1969)", an article by Francesco Cesari: <http://www.visioniproibite.it/franco-files/30-the-jess-franco-files-3-paroxysmus-1969>
4. Roger Greenspun in *The New York Times*, 10 September 1970.
5. *Variety*, 6 May 1970.
6. *La Stampa*, 21 December 1971.

#### **Eugenie... the Story of her Journey into Perversion**

1. From 'Philosophy in the Bedroom' by the Marquis de Sade (p.185 of the Grove Press edition *The Complete Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom and Other Writings*, published in 1965).
2. Christopher Lee, *Lord of Misrule: The Autobiography of Christopher Lee*, p228, Orion Publishing, 2004.
3. *ibid*.
4. *Variety* review, 12 August 1970.
5. *Cinefantastique* #1, Autumn 1970.

#### **Sex Charade**

1. Story from *ABC Madrid*, 13 May 1969.
2. From *Una vida dedicada al cine: recuerdos de un productor*, by Arturo Marcos Tejedor, p.120.
3. J.P. Bouyxou, quoted in *The Manacoa Files*.

#### **The Bloody Judge**

1. *La Vanguardia*, 30 October 1971.
2. *ABC Madrid*, 28 May 1971.

#### **Nightmares Come at Night**

1. To Hans D. Furrer in *Vampir Magazine*, December 1976.
2. *The Manacoa Files*.

#### **Count Dracula**

1. Denis Meikle's *A History of Horrors: The Rise and Fall of the House of Hammer*, Scarecrow Press 2008.
2. To Hans D. Furrer in *Vampir Magazine*, December 1976.
3. Franco cites Oliver Unger, an executive producer involved with Towers of London, as the man who paid him back.
4. *ABC Andalucía*, 1 March 1971.
5. From *Lord of Misrule: The Autobiography of Christopher Lee*, Orion Publishing, 2004.
6. *El Mundo Deportivo*, 26 November 1970.
7. *ABC Andalucía*, 11 March 1971.
8. *Variety*, 7 April 1971.
9. *Monthly Film Bulletin*, July 1973.
10. From *Lord of Misrule: The Autobiography of Christopher Lee*, Orion Publishing, 2004.
11. *La Stampa*, 04 November 1973.

#### **Eugenie**

1. From 'Philosophy in the Bedroom' by the Marquis de Sade (p.185 of the Grove Press edition *The Complete Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom and Other Writings*, published in 1965).
2. In an interview for the Blue Underground DVD of *Eugenie* (released as *Eugenie de Sade*), Franco asserts that he likes creating multi-faceted, or at least 'two-sided' characters.
3. From an interview with Jess Franco for the Blue Underground DVD *Eugenie de Sade*.
4. [http://robertmonell.blogspot.co.uk/2008\\_01\\_01\\_archive.html?zx=7ea4d4043c1a2cea](http://robertmonell.blogspot.co.uk/2008_01_01_archive.html?zx=7ea4d4043c1a2cea)

#### **Vampyros Lesbos**

1. From Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (beginning of Ch. 4).
2. See *The Celluloid Closet* (1981 - revised 1987) by Vito Russo for an in-depth look at depictions of lesbian sexuality in the movies.
3. Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla*.
4. *Obsession* says that *Vampyros Lesbos* was based on Bram Stoker's short story 'Dracula's Guest', although whether or not Franco himself made this claim is unclear.
5. *ABC Andalusia*, 31 July 1974.

#### **She Killed in Ecstasy**

1. Ricardo Bofill's elegant website is at: <http://www.ricardobofill.com/EN/662/PROJECTS/Xanadu-Apartments-in-Calpe.html>
2. Thanks to Lucas Balbo for clearing this up.

#### **The Devil Came from Akasava**

1. *ABC Andalucía*, 21 July 1974.

#### **X312 - Flight to Hell**

1. From an interview with Jess Franco conducted by Amy Brown, curator of an excellent website dedicated to Soledad Miranda: <http://www.soledadmira.com/movies.html>
2. *La Vanguardia*, 13 February 1974.
3. *ABC Andalucía*, 26 August 1975.

#### **El muerto hace las maletas**

1. *La Stampa*, 19 August 1975
2. *Variety's* Sitges Festival report, 25 October 1972.
3. *La Vanguardia*, 11 July 1973.
4. *El Mundo Deportivo*, 13 July 1973.

#### **La venganza del doctor Mabuse**

1. As David Kalat has commented, in his book *The Strange Case of Dr. Mabuse* (McFarland & Company, 2005).
2. Carlos Aguilar, in his book *Jesús Franco* (Catedra, 2011).
3. *ABC Andalucía*, 2 September 1975.

#### **Sexy Darlings**

1. *Sex Stars System*, April 1975.

### **A Virgin among the Living Dead**

1. Interviewed by Pidde Andersson at the 2008 Fantastisk Filmfestival in Sweden. (<http://archive.today/cIgut>).

### **Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein**

1. *La Vanguardia* 9 December 1971.
2. *ABC Madrid*, 21 January 1972.
3. Jean-Pierre Bouyxou, from *The Manacoa Files*.
4. *La Vanguardia*, 21 August 1973.
5. *El Mundo Deportivo*, 10 August 1973.
6. *ABC Madrid* 11 January 1973.
7. *L'Ecran Fantastique*, Winter 1972.
8. *Cinefantastique*, 1972.

### **The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein**

1. Anne Libert interviewed in *Stars System* #19, 1978.
2. *ibid*.
3. *La Vanguardia*, 28 May 1976.
4. *La Vanguardia*, 4 October 1974.

### **Un capitán de quince años**

1. Jules Verne FAQ: <http://jv.gilead.org.il/FAQ/index.en.html>
2. *ABC Madrid*, 13 July 1974.

### **Sinner: the Secret Diary of a Nymphomaniac**

1. See Tim Lucas's 'Video Watchblog': <http://videowatchdog.blogspot.co.uk/2007/05/heres-to-jess-franco-on-his-77th.html>
2. Gareth Jones in *The Monthly Film Bulletin*, April 1974.
3. Marjorie Bilbow in *CinemaTV Today*, 9 March 1974.

### **Relax Baby**

1. *The Lina Romay File*, Tim Greaves & Kevin Collins (One-Shot Productions, 1996).

### **The Sinister Eyes of Dr. Orloff**

1. *La Vanguardia*, 16 February 1973.

### **How to Seduce a Virgin**

1. For the whole story, see Alain Petit's *The Manacoa Files*.
2. Alice Arno in *Sex Stars System* #1, April 1975.
3. See "Franco in the UK" in the introduction.
4. The Marquis de Sade's 'Philosophy in the Bedroom'; p244 and 245 of the Grove Press edition: *The Complete Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom, and Other Writings* (1965).

### **Countess Perverse**

1. See *The Manacoa Files*.
2. see Robert Monell's "I'm in a Jess Franco state of mind" blog: "There's also a hardcore Italian version Sexy Nature, which includes other extremely ugly hardcore inserts not filmed by Jess Franco, and should be avoided at all costs!" ([http://robertmonell.blogspot.co.uk/2007\\_05\\_01\\_archive.html?zx=20e936c501379c79](http://robertmonell.blogspot.co.uk/2007_05_01_archive.html?zx=20e936c501379c79))

### **El misterio del castillo rojo**

1. *The Lina Romay File*, Tim Greaves & Kevin Collins (One-Shot Productions, 1996).

### **The Lustful Amazon**

1. *The Monthly Film Bulletin*, August 1974.

### **Al otro lado del espejo**

1. *ABC Madrid*, 3 June 1973.
2. From an Emma Cohen interview in *ABC Madrid* 1 July 1973. Another interview with Cohen, conducted for *ABC Madrid* on 26 August 1973 after completion of *Al otro lado del espejo*, announced that the actress was heading off next to the Pyrenees with Simon Andreu to shoot 'La fuerza de la hembra' – which became *Aborto criminal* – for director Ignacio F. Iquino.
3. Reported in *Variety*, 22 August 1973.
4. *La Vanguardia*, 21 May 1976.

### **Female Vampire**

1. Belgian lawyer Jean Quérut and his son Pierre Quérut had a small unnamed studio in Brussels where additional scenes were filmed for *Female Vampire*. Material for *Tender and Perverse Emanuelle* and *Kiss Me Killer* was also shot there, possibly at the same time.

2. The same issue featured a four page photo-spread for the newly released Elite Films production *Rolls Royce Baby*, starring Lina Romay.

### **Night of the Skull**

1. *La Vanguardia*, 8 November 1973.

### **La casa del ahorcado**

1. Interview with the author, conducted at Franco's home in 2011.

### **The Hot Nights of Linda**

1. *Sex Stars System* #1, April 1975.
2. Alice Arno in *Sex Stars System* #1, April 1975.
3. Jess Franco interviewed for the Severin Blu-ray release *The Hot Nights of Linda*.

4. On Severin's Blu-ray of *The Hot Nights of Linda* there's an interesting exchange between Franco and Lina Romay about the various versions of the film. Romay says that the wraparound scenes were shot on location in Soisy (aka Soisy-sur-seine). This region, South East of Paris next to the Forêt de Senart, is where Marius Lesoeur had his family home at the time. And it was here, in the Lesoeurs' garage converted into a studio, that scenes for the following Eurociné productions were shot: *La Marque de Zorro* (1975), *Train special pour Hitler* (1975), *Paris Porno* (1975) and *Une cage dorée* (1975). It's therefore highly likely that Franco too availed himself of the Lesoeurs' home, to shoot the wraparound scenes for *The Hot Nights of Linda*.

### **Tender and Perverse Emanuelle**

1. See *The Manacoa Files*.

### **Exorcism**

1. From an interview with Sean O'Neal, October 27, 2009 [<http://www.avclub.com/article/jess-franco-34595>].

### **Célestine, An All Round Maid**

1. From Octave Mirbeau's 1900 novel *Diary of a Chambermaid*.
2. *ibid*.

### **Lorna... the Exorcist**

1. Pamela Stanford interview in *Sex Stars System* #12 April 1976.

### **Les Chatouilleuses**

1. Alain Petit, discussing his experience of working on Franco's movies in *The Manacoa Files*.
2. *Sex Stars System* #4, 1975.

### **Le Jouisseur**

1. Alain Petit's information about the uncut version can be found in *The Manacoa Files*.

### **Eurociné - The Business of Euro-Bis**

1. I am especially indebted to *Cinéma culte européen Volume 1: Eurociné* by Laurent Aknin, Lucas Balbo, Christophe Bier (Christophe Bier Présente, 1999) and *Immoral Tales* by Cathal Tohill, Pete Tombs (Primitive Press, 1994).
2. IMDb records Lesoeur's birth-year as 1911 but Bier and co. go with 1910.
3. Although *Angel of Death*, *Dark Mission* and *Esmeralda Bay* apparently received a release in the provinces.





## Jess Franco & Lina Romay

In conversation with Stephen Thrower  
Malaga, 24th March 2010

**Your films of the 1960s are often co-productions between Spain and France. How did this affect the way they were made?**

JF: On *Cartes sur tables* [*Attack of the Robots*] we wanted to go and shoot in Alicante. I had to ask the actress François Brion to give me her papers, passport and things, and I discovered then that she was from Venezuela – she was not French, although she spoke perfect French. In fact I discovered that in *Cartes sur tables*, no one was French! Only the administrator of the money, and he was called Molière [Franco probably means Robert Demollière, the assistant production manager, who worked as production administrator on *Belle de Jour* and *Diary of a Chambermaid*]. He was French, but no one else was. In a French film! Eddie Constantine was American, he spoke good French but with an American accent. The director of production was a Jewish German called Heinz [aka Henri] Baum. He was a very funny, very likeable man. He spoke very fast French. The director of photography was a Spaniard from Madrid, Antonio Macasoli, an Italian name but he came from Madrid. And all the rest of the people were not French at all. But the French were never as strict about these things as the Spanish. If you had a certain number of French crew or technicians then okay, and if people were from Belgium, for instance, they were always accepted. In Germany you had to have four German people in the cast and among the technicians. But after that it was alright – you could shoot in Germany two days, and in Spain two hundred days! There's a joke: two Germans are talking and one says he's going to learn Spanish because the Spanish like it when you speak their language. So he says to his friend, I'm going to learn two words of Spanish each day, each day I will add another two words, and eventually I will have everything here – and here he pats his back pocket – "In my culo!" In my ass! (laughs) This is a German joke! **A film like *Attack of the Robots*, and others like *Lucky the Inscrutable* and *Sadisterotica*, were spoofs of the spy craze, or they were part of that wave of playful 'pop' spy films, with tongue in cheek. Did you see many of these films as they came out, like *Our Man Flint*, or *Modesty Blaise*?**

JF: *Modesty Blaise* was a joke, I didn't believe in it. Losey was sometimes a disaster, but I liked him anyway, he was a very clever guy. Even if you don't always like the films, he's always intelligent. *The Servant* is very good. You know, I was at the opening in Paris of *Eva* [released in Paris 3rd October 1962], with Jeanne Moreau. And it was such a flop, from a commercial point of view. Most of the people left the theatre before the ending. And myself, I had

an appointment with him, because he wanted to talk to me about his great friend Nicholas Ray. And I said okay, we'll meet after the show. Impossible to believe, but after the film no one was in the room with him, and Joe Losey was crying. I said 'Oh don't worry' but it was such a flop it was impossible for him to react otherwise. We went to a bar, the Britus bar, in a street close to the Champs-Élysées. He started to drink, gin and then whiskey, and then gin and then whiskey, and then he collapsed, completely out. Because the film was a disaster. But he said to me, I don't care that the film is a flop, I'm upset because my close friend Nic Ray is dying in Spain. And it was at the time of shooting his *King of Kings*, and poor Joe Losey thought Ray was very ill and dying imminently. But it wasn't true. The reason Joe Losey wanted to meet me was to ask me to contact Nic Ray. I said, 'What's wrong? He's fine' and Losey said 'I don't believe you!' Finally he asked me please call Madrid if you know someone in contact with Nic, and it was easy, my god, his first assistant was my first assistant on one of my films, so it was simple. I called him, and this guy Juan [perhaps either Juan Estelrich, Franco's assistant director on *Tenemos 18 años*, or Juan Cobos, his assistant director on *The Sadistic Baron von Klaus*, although neither is credited on *King of Kings*] was already sleeping. He says, 'What do you want?' I say I'm with Joseph Losey in Paris, he wants to know if Nicholas Ray is dying. He says 'Nic Ray is okay, the only problem is that the producers don't want him to finish the film, they want to finish with another director'. I told Losey and he said 'Are you sure they're telling the truth? In that case I'm not so disappointed to have a flop – I've had a lot of flops!' **I understand that Orson Welles saw and liked one of your films, before you actually met?**

JF: Yes, it was before. When I first met Orson, it's because he saw a film of mine in Paris called *Death Whistles the Blues* [*La muerte silba un blues*]. He thought it was interesting so he asked the producer to call me and asked me to do the second unit on a film he was going to make: which means he liked my film, yes? If he didn't he wouldn't have said a word! And then the producer of my *Rififi en la ciudad* [José López-Brea?] said to Orson, but this is because you saw the best film he ever made in his life! He made with me recently a shit of a film called *Rififi en la ciudad*. So Orson said okay, let me see just one reel. The producer was very happy, because he thought as soon as Orson sees this he will choose another second unit director...

**Was he trying to persuade Welles to hire a friend of his?**

JF: No, not his friend, it was someone who had recently made

an awful historical film. But then, Orson sees my *Rififi* and says, "Call him immediately!" About this other guy he said, "Don't ever mention him to me again!"

**Welles must have been quite an intimidating figure...**

JF: Yes, but I'll tell you this story. John Gielgud was furious with Orson on *Chimes at Midnight* because he thought Orson didn't like him as an actor. Which is crazy. Gielgud was a wonderful man, clever, full of intuition, but Orson was afraid of him, because to Orson Gielgud was, you know, royalty. Gielgud was speaking and Orson said to me, 'I can't play a scene with this guy - I'm just a poor guy from the mid-West! He's a genius of the language.' Orson, with some people, was very humble. He was not always the pretentious man that everyone makes out. For instance, directing actors, my God! He was a master! In two words they understood exactly what to do and how to do it. British actors loved him. They were all in love with him.

**Although you've worked with many great British actors, you've never filmed in the UK...**

JF: But I remember when I was working for AIP I used to come to London more or less once a month, because my editor was in London. I prefer the British cinema. David Lean; the first period, not so much the enormous productions. I think it's more serious, deeper, among the best in the world. Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger. Alexander Mackendrick. The Ealing films, wow! *Kind Hearts and Coronets* is a masterpiece. Everyone talks about Alec Guinness in that, but Dennis Price was wonderful. Robert Morley, I worked with him on [Orson Welles's] *Treasure Island*, so clever. Orson asked me to work on it, you know, and to work with people like that is a pleasure. The actors I prefer in the whole world are British, or Irish. Christopher Lee, he's a good actor - now. Very good. I worked with Leo Genn on *The Bloody Judge*. At first I had Leo Genn planned for the role of the Judge, but AIP decided that Christopher was more popular.

**It's funny, because you seem far more enmeshed in French culture, at least when it comes to your production arrangements...**

JF: I don't know if I know the French people deeply, or the French outlook. The French are very difficult, and not just if you are Spanish. They don't take you seriously. A director of the official cinema in France said to some of my collaborators, 'Why do you insist on working with this director from Spain, making little films for the American video market?' The Germans were much more open. In the sense that they admitted I could bring them something that they were not so able to do. It never happened to me in France, because the French, as you know, think they are the cleverest at everything, the best! But then it's not true; when you know them more deeply it's a mask.

**Around the time you were working with Harry Alan Towers, you also went off and made a couple of interesting small films, one of which seems to have disappeared entirely: *Sex Charade*.**

JF: It's lost, the negative is lost. Even I can't find it. The only thing I can think of is perhaps to remake it. And the idea of the film, I think, was funny. I was trying to make a story that becomes another one, and then another, and then a fourth, and then folds around and comes back to the beginning.

**The synopsis I've seen reminded me of Scheherazade, the Thousand and One Nights...**

JF: No, I don't think it's the same feeling. I wanted to build a story without an ending. A story that begins another one, like life.

**Also in the late 1960s you had some dealings with another of my favourite Spanish directors, Eloy de la Iglesia; what do you recall about him?**

JF: Eloy de la Iglesia I knew very well. I made the music for one of his films. He had very nice ideas. The problem with him was he was completely drunk most of the time, during the day and even the night, and he was unhappy because everything was against him, at least he felt that way. So his films are very uneven because one day he was well, and the next argh, he was hysterical. But in my opinion he was a clever guy, a cultivated man, but a little bit too mad, that's all.

**Among your many films, one of the best, to me, is *A Virgin among the Living Dead* or - what shall we call it? - *Christina Princess de l'erotisme*.**

JF: *Christina* came about while we were in Portugal, and I decided I wanted to do something more interesting, from an intellectual point of view, not the little 'sexy' films. I already had most of the people close to me, we were shooting another film. It was three weeks shooting, in Portugal. So I decided to go through this in a surrealistic way, showing a little of the same kind of thing, but done much more deeply. It was inspired by *Alice in Wonderland*. Alice is one of the characters I admire most in literature - there's enough there to inspire a hundred films!

**Did you see the Tim Burton version recently?**

JF: Do you like Tim Burton?

No. Not at all.

JF: I hate him. Because he's pretentious. I hate pretension. It's 'Look at me, I'm doing a masterpiece'. What is a masterpiece? Maybe you are close to such a thing, then ten years after, you look at it and 'Oh no, not any more!' I think the important thing is to be sincere and to say what you feel. Maybe one year you feel 'x' and another year you feel 'y'. I don't consider any film a 'magnum opus', even the best.

**I know that you like to improvise with the camera, but it must be hard to avoid descending into chaos. In the absence of a detailed script did you discuss your aims with the cast?**

JF: No, because I don't have time! I'm very sorry, but I am the kind of man who acts first and understands later. Stanley Kubrick was the reverse of this; he would try to understand it and then do it maybe two hundred times over. I am a jazz musician, and when you're playing, many times what you play is lacking, because you're aware of the clichés, or because you're not in the mood, but on the



day you find the mood, you play well. Even if you are not a great player, you play well because you've got it inside.

**Alongside Christina I find Lorna... the Exorcist to be one of your best 'supernatural' films...**

JF: I like it. I like it. While I don't really like most of my films, *Lorna* is one of the very few that I do. Also, you didn't say anything about the one that fucking de Nesle called *La miroir obscène*. The original title is *Al otro lado del espejo*: that's one of the best. Emma Cohen studied at the same Barcelona acting school as Lina. Escola Massana in Barcelona. And the other actors are very good - Philippe Lemaire, Françoise Brion. Robert Woods. Brion, a lovely woman, who was one of the most important actresses in the Nouvelle Vague, and I knew her very well, we were good friends.

**Also in relation to the supernatural, what is it that draws you to the subject of hypnotism and mind-control? Have you ever practised hypnotism, or been hypnotised?**

JF: What is it? I don't really know. Maybe it is because I like the double play between true, sincere things, and fantasy, and also perhaps because... (trails off)

**It struck me that mind control, controlling people at a distance, is kind of like being a film director, because you're steering your cast into actions that they wouldn't perform of their own volition. So I wondered if you felt there was a similarity between being a film director and being a hypnotist?**

JF: Maybe in my case it's true because I got such awful actors, a lot of the time, that I had to try hypnotism! I used all the various methods with my poor actors, from the more clear and proper sort of thing, 'You have to feel from the inside', la-la-la, to shouting 'STAY THERE! DON'T MOVE!' 'But I...' 'SHUT UP!' You know? (laughs). Whichever was the more practical and better for them. I usually shot through the camera myself and this gave me much deeper control of my films. Klaus Kinski once said to me - and he was not a person to give you, you know, flowers - he said, 'I like to work with you because you're a good mirror.'

**Generally, do you talk to the actors during a shot? Because the films are dubbed later... so if you're filming, do you talk whilst people are acting, do you instruct verbally? Or do you only talk to them at the beginning, before a shot?**

JF: I do both things. I talk at the beginning, but what happens is you talk at the beginning and then... nothing happens! So you keep talking. But in general, actors like me a lot. And I think actors are the most important thing in a film, more than the director. And if an actor does something interesting that I didn't ask for, great, I will keep it. Fernando Fernán Gómez, in a film of mine, *Rififi en la ciudad*, I asked him for a difficult sequence, difficult because of the feelings, and he played it ten times better than I was asking for. **You worked closely with Daniel White on the music, and sometimes you play it yourself, which puts you very much in control of a film's 'magic spell', its mood. What can you tell me about your work with Daniel White?**

JF: In general, I play the less complicated things and Daniel plays the more difficult! He was much better than me. I played the synthesiser solo on 'Sexy Rock', it's on *Lilian (la virgen pervertida)* - I played in the style of rock guitar! I play the electric piano on *Abberaciones de una mujer casada*, and *Macumba sexual*. The saxophone player was usually this black guy from Martinique, living in Paris ... In general, the music made by the Dietrich 'family' I don't care for. Sometimes they were very negative, for instance on *Jack the Ripper* it didn't work. Can you imagine *Jack the Ripper* with Bruno Nicolai's music? It would be a different film ... Daniel White had such a facility to write music. We were meeting at an address on the Champs-Élysées, and at the same time he was writing a piece of music for the next film - and talking to me at the same time! And smoking a cigar! All at the same time. And the music he made for *Don Quixote* - oh! Wonderful. And very much Spanish music. In a very elegant way, but Spanish. Daniel was an organ player of great ability, he worked with symphony orchestras. He lived near a Church in Paris, in the Latin Quarter, and Daniel was a very close friend to the organist of the church, and he always had permission to go in, to play and to record ... I worked with Bruno Nicolai in Rome, I played the 'wild' sounds, attacking inside the piano, on *Christina, princesse de l'erotisme* ... You mention *Exorcism*, well, of course the music for *Exorcism*, the first time, was Benichou [André Benichou], a gypsy musician, amazing! What a talent. But let me ask you - between *Exorcism* and *Sadist of Notre Dame*, which do you prefer?

**I like them both - but I think I like Sadist more.**

JF: Me too. With the first one we had to do it very quickly. And there was, from the Lesoeurs, interference on that film, they wanted to add things, like the orgy, which goes on and on.

**The scene from Exorcism that I really miss, which you removed for Sadist, is the opening scene with Lina and Lynn Monteil, the S&M show.**

JF: I didn't like it because it was a repetition of *Necronomicon*.

**Some of my favourite material of yours, ever, is the additional material in Sadist of Notre Dame, the scenes with you among the derelicts and the alcoholics, where you appear as a dropout, a total outsider.**

JF: Thank-you, because no one ever told me anything good about these scenes before.

**Things have often been difficult for you too. Looking back, which were the hardest times in your career, when things were not going so well?**

JF: It's hard, in my career, to say. It was all hard! Probably, it was when, for political reasons, I had to leave Spain. Because of politics. I had to do it. I don't talk about it often, because I don't like to, you know, to play the victim. I was never a victim of anything. But I got serious difficulties with the ministries. They hated me, the officials. **In 1978-1979, after your time with Erwin Dietrich, you slowed down drastically for a year and made just a few films, much less than before. Was that a bad time?**

JF: Not exactly after Dietrich, but more or less. The problem with Dietrich was, I was working every day, and I was very happy, because he wanted to use me as a means to have a director sitting in front of him, making films for him, and he was very happy about it, but then when the industry prospects started to be less certain for small films, he wanted me to make less films, a couple of films a year. Immediately I realised that it was better for me to go, because the chance to work as I liked was over.

**You went back to Robert de Nesle after Dietrich, yes? And made *Elles font tout, Je brûle de partout...***

JF: Yes, but this was shit. I never signed those films, I never *wanted* to sign those films. I had to do them because I was completely broke.

**And *Cocktail special*, another one...**

JF: Yes, yes. All shit.

**Then you made *Opalo de fuego*, a very different kind of film, a strange mixture of comedy and violent drama...**

JF: Yes, that's right, it was a restart, for me, in the Spanish cinema. I went to the Canary Islands and I decided to stay for a while and make films there, to change my mind and to carry on, you know.

**One of the highlights of your early 1980s work, I would say, is *Eugenie, historia de una perversion* with Katia Beinert.**

JF: That's one of the... well, I don't say I like my films at all... but that is one of the best I made during that period.

**Lina, your character in this *Eugenie* is, well, crazy...**

LR: No, I'm a dog! I play the dog, Sultana! It was nice! 'Hey Sultana!' 'Bow wow!' But then he [Jess] is telling me, no, you are not saying your lines very well!

**It's a little bit like your character in *Plaisir à trois*?**

LR: No, that was another scene completely.

**Well, she's deranged, right?**

LR: Yes, but not in *Eugenie*. She's a masochist who wants to be a dog. It's not the same thing.

**Films like *Lorna... the Exorcist* or *Exorcism* were very dark - does this affect the 'feel' or the mood of the shoot, or is it something you only realise later, in the editing for instance?**

LR: It's very difficult to answer that, because when I make the film I'm involved in the film. I'm like a jazz player, but without an instrument! I play. When he gives me something to do, it just comes naturally. It's because I enjoy what I do.

**The American director James Bryan said to me that he noticed people working in the sex film industry go a little crazy after a while because they're always watching sex and never participating, so all that arousal, that energy, is never expressed physically. Did you ever find yourself feeling that way?**

JF: Never. I directed my films completely outside of sexual relationships. I worked as a witness, but a very neutral witness.

**Desire comes across as always potentially dangerous in your films. As a person who has made a lot of films with sexual content, have you ever felt that it was a dangerous obsession?**

JF: For me? To become a madman killing poor girls? (laughs). Yes sometimes, I've had the feeling to start killing actors! On *Cuanto cobra una espia?*, one actor I had was so shit, he was an Argentinian guy [Emilio Linder], he knew everything about everything. I decided to kill him. His part could have taken three days more, I decided no: it was so hard to stand him that I decided to kill him. So we decided to have Antonio Mayans shoot him the next day, so we could send him back to Madrid!

LR: But Jess didn't tell him that he was going to be killed!

JF: Because if I tell him you will get killed, in this moment, he will do anything in the world to stop the shooting.

LR: So this actor and his girlfriend [Analía Ivars], who was his partner and who was also awful, they had to hitchhike. Antonio Mayans drives up, winds down his window. The Argentinian says, 'Can you drive me to the next town?' and Antonio says 'No!' and shoots them! And he was 'Oh! Oh!'

JF: He was so astonished! He couldn't have reacted like that if he'd known. He played that better than anything else in his life!

LR: And Jess was the camera inside the car, no? And when the actor falls down Jess claps his hands and says 'Okay! Very good! We are finished now, you can go!'

JF: It's one of the films from this period that I prefer. Because, I think it's very funny. It starred Juan Soler, a very good actor. A better actor than a cameraman! But at this time I had no producer with authority over me, so I could do the things that I wanted to. With *Cuanto cobra una espia?*, the scene where we are killing the people through the window of the car, you had to be free to do it, otherwise you have the producer shouting 'Hey! What the hell are you doing?' Do you like *El sexo está loco*?

**Yes! I saw it very recently, when I was very drunk, so my memory of it is extremely confused!**

JF: That's probably the best way to watch it! (laughs). You know the spaceship? It was a discotheque in Benidorm! We had permission from the boss to shoot in there, but he wasn't there.

LR: It was very early in the morning. 8 o'clock. The night porter was still asleep. My favourite scene, I love, is when we are driving the car at two kilometres an hour and making up this crazy language!

**Jess, in later years you and Lina worked more and more closely, to the point where some films are credited to her. Can you shed some light on this?**

JF: Asking what Lina did and what I did is like asking my right hand what my left hand did! In general the other directors who worked with Lina didn't know as much about cinema as she did. They would ask her! Even Jorge Grau, who is quite a good director in Spain. And Grau is a real technician of cinema. He's not an idiot. The only problem with him is that he's from the Opus Dei!

**Did you ever turn down a project on the grounds of disliking the premise, or the genre? Did anyone ever approach you to make a film along the lines of, say, the Nazisploitation films like *Ilsa She Wolf of the SS*?**

JF: Yes, but I didn't want to. I hate those kinds of things. You know,

I tried once with *Oasis of the Living Dead*, because it was amusing, an adventure, but in general I think this is a very low point of view, a very shit thing. It's like the cannibals, I never thought that I would like to make a cannibal film either, I did two, with some relationship to the genre, but very far off really. Because the cannibal films, it's a lot of lies. The Italian guys who made them, saying oh, we paid two hundred million lira to a black guy in New Guinea to let us cut off his leg, it's not true. I saw a couple of these films, I saw the most famous of these things, *Cannibal Holocaust*, and everything in it is a fucking lie. And very badly done.

**Anything you wish you'd been given that you still haven't got around to making?**

JF: I would like to make a film of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. I love the Stevenson book, the principal idea. I want to make a real Jekyll and Hyde story.

**In the course of the interview Jess would often digress, or else I would ask a non-sequitur question that interrupted the flow of the interview. I've trimmed these from the main text above, but here they are in 'out-take' form:**

**Howard Vernon:**

JF: His father was Swiss and his mother was American. He was from a very rich, very cultivated Swiss family, from the German side of Switzerland. He moved to Paris. I asked him many times, 'What is your language?' He always said, 'I prefer to talk in English or German.' For me German is a beautiful language but very fucking difficult! People say it's a harsh language, like dogs barking, but it's not true! To hear Klaus Kinski speaking German is a pleasure.

**Roger Darton:**

JF: He's Belgian. I liked him very much. But he only got the chance to play important parts in Belgium. In *Frauengefängnis* he's very good.

**Montserrat Prous:**

JF: Montserrat was from Barcelona. She studied at the same theatre academy as Lina. They were quite close friends. Actors from Barcelona, and the schools, are much better than those from Madrid. The people in Catalonia, if they are studying theatre, they do it seriously and they try to do their best. In Madrid they don't care - it's just for fun.

**Alice Arno:**

JF: She has a business importing coffee from Colombia. Because she made sex films nobody took her seriously. Only a man called Claude Pierson, who made a strange version of *Justine* with her. And for me it was very wrong, I know *Justine* quite well, deeply, and for the story she has to be a child, almost, no more than fourteen or fifteen. And Alice was... well... it's not believable.

**Fred Williams:**

JF: He was very good-looking, a very pretty guy. He married a very rich German woman, and he didn't work any more. He's on holiday - forever!

**Pamela Stanford:**

JF: Pamela Stanford and Anne Libert were very cultivated people, both of them. Anne Libert was the daughter of a quite important novelist, a writer of 'serie-noir' books. She had a very serious education.

**Jean-Luc Godard:**

JF: I like most of the films of Jean-Luc Godard - maybe my favourite film of his is *Made in USA*.

**Pasolini's *Salo*; or the 120 Days of Sodom:**

JF: No, I don't like it. It's not truthful. When I feel that things are false, in general I don't like it. With the Pasolini film I didn't believe in it at all. I like the historical Pasolini films; *Medea* I love. Wonderful.

*Eugenie ...the Story of her Journey into Perversion:*

JF: I don't like it that much. The second one is two hundred times better. It's because of the actors - Marie Liljedahl was very nice looking, but she wasn't an actress! Whereas Soledad Miranda was perfect.

**Erwin Dietrich:**

LR: It was very simple to work with Dietrich. He was fine because he never came to the set. Never! I met him at the office but not on the set. Not at all like Robert de Nesle: he was all the time on the set, oh yes! (laughs) For the girls.

**The Lesoeurs:**

LR: With them it was different. Marius was kind of a grandfather, but, you know, like a *robber* grandfather! Because all the time there would be less money, and he'd be saying 'Oh you are very nice and I love you and...'

JF: '...Do you fuck for duck eggs?' [laughs uproariously] It was a very difficult situation. He was a very rich man, you see, with properties in Spain and Belgium.

LR: But that is how you stay rich, for some people, you don't spend!

**Julian Esteban:**

JF: Julian Esteban is the complete reverse of all those guys we were talking about. He was a very good director of production before he produced films. Very good. He knew a lot, about all the industry, perfectly. Almost from childhood he was working in a production company, one of the best in Spain, with producers who were very clever, so Julian knew the industry perfectly.

**Artur Brauner:**

JF: After Harry Alan Towers, the cleverest producer I ever had.

**The Larragas:**

JF: The Golden Films productions, that couple, the Larragas, they made films just to put under the bed! They didn't want anyone to see them! Golden Films were very good for us, for a while. As producers, they were unable even to get up the courage to ask me what was the film about! 'What do you want to do now Jess?' 'I want to do *Voces de muerte*' 'Ah... What kind of story is it?' 'A horror film.' 'Oh...' And that was it! Perfect producers! Until it was time to be paid...



## APPENDIX

### FRANCO AT THE BBFC

#### November 1962 - The Awful Dr. Orloff

Submitted by Grand National Pictures on the 12th November 1962 at a length of 86m08s, Franco's debut horror film arrived with three titles on the admission sheet: "Doctor Orloff", "The Horrible Dr. Orloff" and "The Demon Doctor" (the latter being the eventual UK release title). Several cuts were required to obtain an 'X' certificate. The censor demanded a reduction to the scene in which Orloff operates on Irma, stipulating that it should stop before Orloff's scalpel touches the victim's face. Shots of Morpho 'watching' were also removed (ironically, as Morpho is blind) along with all post-operative shots of Irma with skin removed from one side of her face (quite a subtle detail on DVD that must have looked a lot more gruesome on the big screen). Also excised were all shots of Irma chained by the wrists in Orloff's attic. In addition to the film's visual transgressions, two lines of dialogue were cut: Orloff's "*She may still be of use to me...*", and a line which the examiner records as "On second thoughts, I could use her for further experiments" (which, assuming it's the same English dub, is an approximation of the line, "*I intend to see if I can make further use of the last woman*"). This latter is an unfortunate loss because it obscures the point at which Arnette can no longer accept Orloff's butchery.

It's evident that the version seen by the British censor was derived from Franco's first cut, *Gritos en la noche*, and not the French re-edit *L'Horrible Dr. Orloff*, because there's no mention of Orloff's scalpel slicing between Irma's breasts, or the manhandling of Wanda's breasts by Morpho. Yet *Gritos en la noche* runs close to 93m; if, as records indicate, the version submitted ran for only 86m, this suggests that Grand National had already made cuts prior to submission. BBFC records do not indicate the running time after cuts were performed: assuming the distributor followed instructions to the letter, I estimate around two minutes were removed, leaving *The Demon Doctor* running approximately 84 minutes. Note: *The Monthly Film Bulletin* listed the release version as 86m; this seems to be an error, as documentation at the BBFC clearly states the film was submitted at that length.

#### September 1966 - The Diabolical Dr. Z

*The Diabolical Dr. Z* was submitted by S.F. Distributors Ltd. on the 6th of October 1966 at a recorded length of 86m08s. The film's admission sheet declares the title as "Doctor Z and Miss Death" (*The Diabolical Dr. Z* is added in pen, indicating that the retitling occurred some time later). It appears to have been viewed first in a German language print without subtitles, about which the examiner notes, "*No subtitles were available and we should have to see these, unless there is an intention of dubbing this film.*" Unlike the fairly neutral reception for *The Demon Doctor*, this time the examiner found the film disagreeable enough to add a comment, "*A very nasty film with a number of 'horror-comic' sequences in it.*" Although perceptive in spotting an influence on Franco's visual style, the reference is scarcely benign; the American horror comics were the 'video nasties' of their day, and after protests in the media alleging their unsuitability for children, the Children and Young Persons

(Harmful Publications) Act was introduced in 1955, effectively banning them.

The trims included key moments of horror such as Irma cutting her face with the scalpel, and Bergen's scream as a steel pin is inserted into his head. The censor also homed in on the film's morbid eroticism: "*Reduce to a minimum Miss Death's act with the dummy ... reduce to a minimum [shots of] Nadia when wearing the spider costume ... in particular her struggle with Bergen in the theatre ... Something drastic must be done if [Nadia's] fighting with Irma and Barbara is to be allowed at all. The cuts would have to be very extensive ... Remove episode in which Nadia is made to strip naked, gets hysterics, and is locked up in dungeon ... reduce scene in which Nadia pretends to make love to Vicas ... remove shot of Vicas pulling her dress down and remove as far as possible all shots of her semi-nude.*" With such a dispiriting list, it's little wonder the distributor took a while to get round to the job; the film was resubmitted on the 6th of March 1967, and after further alterations ("*Remove shot of Sandra when she is searching house and stands in front of fire which silhouettes her figure ... reduce Bergen's struggles with Sandra and in particular remove shots of him smashing her head through the glass of a window ... reduce the fight between Bergen and Philip before they arm themselves.*") was eventually passed. A letter from the distributor confirming the remaining cuts was sent on the 22nd of March 1967, after which the film played UK cinemas in a version lasting 78m26s.

Among the excisions, it's interesting that Nadia's attack of hysterics should be singled out. The scene features little that is visually 'near the knuckle'; perhaps the woman's passionate gasps and moans of despair aroused concern? The later alterations are more puzzling: the image of Sandra Moroni silhouetted by the light of the open fire is conveyed in chaste medium shot, with little but the shape of her legs visible through her dress. Likewise it's hard to see what is so unacceptable about the fist fight between Bergen and Philip; no blood is spilled, and it's shot in semi-darkness. Note: It's unclear whether the film was submitted on the 6th of September 1966, or 6th of October 1966; the earlier date is written on the first examiner's report but the later one appears on the admission sheet.

#### July 1968 - The Blood of Fu Manchu

Submitted by Anglo-Amalgamated Film Distributors Ltd. on the 19th of July 1968, with an undisclosed running time, *The Blood of Fu Manchu* required cuts to achieve that rarity in Franco's career, an 'A' rating (suitable for children with adult supervision). The instructions were as follows: "*[Remove] all shots of chained girls, including the naked girl before Lin Tang's entry ... considerably shorten the whole episode of Sancho's men attacking village ... remove shot of Uma [sic] when her breasts are partly visible; remove the line 'Doubtless he is proud of being a man' when Sancho is captured.*" The cuts were made and the film was resubmitted for approval on the 12th of August 1968, after which it toured UK cinemas in a print lasting just 61m23s!

Even the longest version currently available (Blue Underground's DVD) does not show nudity in these early scenes, so the version screened at the

BBFC apparently contained footage not present in subsequent digital editions. (Publicity shots exist of a chained Maria Röhm with her breasts exposed, but these relate to a much later sequence: such a scene can not have been present in the version seen by the Board, as it would certainly have been remarked upon). Finally, it's worth noting that even the most fleeting threat of castration, however obliquely phrased, was forbidden.

#### February 1969 - 99 Women

BBFC examiners saw *99 Women* for the first time on 25th of February 1969, and they reacted with immediate revulsion, one examiner remarking that the film, "[has] no purpose but to promote salaciousness and sadism." A rejection letter to Commonwealth United Entertainment on the 11th April 1969 declared: "*The film is a disgusting piece of exploitation ... I hope that this picture is not an example of what your company intends to distribute. If it is, you should not expect Censorship Certificates for public exhibition.*" A second viewing on the 15th of April at the request of the distributor failed to soften opinion, although a list of possible cuts was drawn up, including: "...the whole of the lesbian lovemaking scene between Zoe and Marie ... the whole of the flashback scene of the lesbian club where Zoe worked ... all shots of Zoe and another woman making love ... the fight between Zoe and another woman ... all shots of Rosalie and male convict copulating, and Marie watching and masturbating ... the mass rape of Rosalie." At this point Commonwealth United approached the Greater London Council (GLC) for a local 'X' certificate, but to no avail: on the 7th of May the GLC decided not to grant one. New buyers Miracle Films made heavy cuts to the film the following month, in line with those outlined on the 15th of April, and resubmitted it on the 25th June. Now greatly reduced, *99 Women* was passed, subject to two further changes; another cut to the mass rape of Rosalie and removal of the sound of an off-camera flogging. The Board's final decision was conveyed to Commonwealth United on 16th of September 1969, seven months after the initial submission. The film went out theatrically in a version lasting just 70m.

#### April 1969 - Justine

Submitted by Gala Film Distributors as 'The Misfortunes of Virtue' (or 'The Misfortune of Virtue' on the admission slip), in an uncut version running 124 minutes, *Justine* met with immediate censor resistance. It was screened on the 11th of April 1969, in the presence of BBFC Secretary John Trevelyan, and was roundly rejected. "*The film is a mixture of torture, sadism, lesbianism, violence, homosexuality and murder, with a considerable amount of nudity,*" stated the rejection letter sent on the 14th of April 1969, "*Many of the scenes would be completely unacceptable. Furthermore I do not believe that the film could be made acceptable to this Board even by extensive cutting.*" Early in July 1969 Gala Film asked if they could resubmit the film with cuts, but in a letter dated the 21st of July John Trevelyan himself wrote back, saying, "*Don't waste your time.*" At this point Gala Film appear to have accepted that the film was a non-starter for British release.

John Trevelyan left the BBFC on the 1st of July 1971, to be replaced by Stephen Murphy. This 'changing of the guard' inspired a second distributor, Anthony Balch, to test the waters with *Justine* (submitting it under the title *Justine and Juliet*). Aware of its previous rejection, Balch made three changes before sending his version to the BBFC, removing most of the montage of

naked girls in the prison scene at the beginning, cutting short the scene in which De Bressac and his male lover brand Justine's breast with a red-hot iron, and making heavy cuts to the torture scene involving Justine and the satanic monks. An examiner of this second version opined, on the 12th of July 1971, that "*What is left seems pretty tame now,*" and recommended that the film be passed with an 'X' certificate subject to two further "modifications": shortening the scene in which Juliet drowns Claudine, and removing the Marquis de Bressac's line to his wife (drawn directly from Sade), "*I find it stimulating to make love to someone who quite soon will be dead.*" [Note; this latter document lists the film's title as "*The Misfortunes of Virtue (Justine)*".] Balch made the two remaining cuts and submitted the film again on the 26th of July 1971. With a running time of 104m, *Justine* was now ready for a British cinema release. Balch himself handled correspondence with the BBFC, and in order to help things along with the new Director he announced he would be adding a "creeping title" to the front of the film, the content of which would read as follows: "*The Marquis de Sade spent a third of his life in jail, kept there by the schemings of his vindictive mother-in-law, Madame de Montreuil. In jail Sade wrote many stories, none so famous as the diabolical tale of Justine and her evil sister Juliet...*" No version with such a text currently exists on video, DVD or Blu-ray.

#### February 1970 - Succubus

*Succubus* was yet another contentious Franco title. Submitted by Tigon Pictures on the 1st of February 1970, at a length of 81m18s, it was immediately rejected by the Board. The examiner's report described it as, "*A disjointed, incomprehensible film with long passages of phantasy. There is a sense of degeneracy about it.*" The disappointed distributor asked the Board to watch the film again, this time with Secretary John Trevelyan in attendance. Trevelyan then wrote to Tigon's Tony Tenser on the 11th of March 1970: "*After viewing the film Succubus twice, we have decided that we shall not be prepared to issue a certificate for it. The film is decadent and degrading, and it contains scenes of sex and sexual perversions and violence that are totally unacceptable to the Board.*"

In September 1971, two months after the appointment of Stephen Murphy as director of the BBFC, Oppidan Films – owned by the UK's "King of Sexploitation", David Hamilton Grant – tested the water by applying for a local 'X' certificate from Berkshire County Council. A screening was also arranged on the 1st of October 1971 at the National Film Theatre, for representatives of Surrey County Council and the GLC. All three councils decided not to grant a local certificate. Two years later, on the 18th of September 1973, Grant submitted a slightly shorter version of the film to the BBFC, running 80m59s, and also approached the GLC again. In a letter to the council's viewing committee dated 17th of September 1973, Grant made an intriguing claim: "*This German feature film was viewed by the GLC Viewing Committee on the 1st of October 1971, having been refused censorship by the BBFC in 1971. Because of its commercial success in other countries the producers and Oppidan decided not only to edit the film but to refilm certain sequences. The total changes now amount to over 25% of the film, i.e. over 20 minutes of additional film has been added. Apart from the title and the main storyline it would be correct to say that this is another film.*" Meanwhile, at the BBFC, the shorter version was passed for an 'X' certificate with the imposition of just one cut to the opening scene, in which Lorna trails a knife over wounds on Bella's breasts.

The cut was duly made, and an 'X' certificate was granted on the 24th of September 1973. Still seeking a 'local X' for the uncut version, Oppidan approached Surrey Council again, arranging a viewing on the 15th of November. However, having apparently taken at face value David Grant's claim that the film had been substantially altered since its first screening, the Surrey Council viewing committee granted *Succubus* a 'local X' certificate on the 22nd of November 1973 without rewatching it...

So, what are we to make of Grant's statement that his version of *Succubus* contained 20 minutes of new material? Bearing in mind the reputation of this consummately shady businessman, the story is almost certainly – to use his own vernacular – a load of old pony. If such a version *does* exist, needless to say it would be of immense interest to Franco aficionados!

#### May 1970 - Venus in Furs

Submitted by Commonwealth United on the 1st of May 1970, at a length of 86m01s, *Venus in Furs* was summarily rejected on the 4th of May. The examiner remarked, "The killing at the start of the film, on which the whole of the rest of the film hangs, is totally unacceptable and would have to be entirely removed," adding, "There is other material in the film which we cannot accept..." In his closing comments he described the film as, "Nasty and pretentious with most of the actresses naked for nearly all of the time." Cuts, it was felt, would have to be so numerous that they would ruin the "already rather tenuous" continuity. Commonwealth United appear to have given up at this point, as there are no further documents relating to the film. [Note: there is confusion in the BBFC documentation due to another film called *Venus in Furs*, directed by Massimo Dallamano, which went before the Board in January 1970.]

#### May 1970 - Eugenie... the Story of her Journey into Perversion

According to cinema listings in the UK magazine *Continental Film Review*, this played at the Compton Club, London, in May 1970 as *Philosophy in the Boudoir*. However it appears never to have been submitted to the BBFC for a theatrical certificate under this or any other title.

#### September 1970 - Castle of Fu Manchu

Passed uncut (with an 'A' certificate) on the 11th of September 1970, at a length of 92m07s.

#### November 1971 - Count Dracula

Submitted by Hemdale as *Bram Stoker's Count Dracula*, this was passed uncut with an 'X' certificate on the 17th of November 1971 at a length of 96m32s. However, the film did not reach cinemas until the summer of 1973.

#### March 1973 - The Demons

The BBFC enjoyed a holiday from Jess Franco in 1972, with none of his films troubling the examiners that year. In 1973, however, he was back with a vengeance. *The Demons*, submitted by Curtis Elliot's Cinecenta on the 23rd of March 1973, with a running time of 91m01s, was rejected without hesitation. BBFC director Stephen Murphy wrote wearily to Elliot on the 27th of March, "We saw your film *The Demons* yesterday. I wish I could persuade you not to go into this field of sadism." Cinecenta telephoned the Board a day later to ask why *The Demons* was being banned when *The Exorcist* had just been passed. Murphy

wrote in response, "The film contains elements of sadism in the strict sense of that much abused word. I can not see that the passing of *The Exorcist* has any relevance at all to our decision about *The Demons*."

A year later, Cinecenta launched a blizzard of applications to city councils around England, seeking local 'X' certificates. Between March 1974 and July 1975 they approached the following: Greater London, Birmingham, Coventry, Bristol, Portsmouth, Liverpool, Leeds, Newcastle, Leicester, Sheffield, Great Yarmouth, Norwich, Southampton, and somewhere bizarre, where was it - oh yes, Doncaster. On the 31st of December 1974 Coventry Council wrote to the BBFC to say that they had seen the film and would, "raise no objection to it being exhibited to the public of Coventry." Bristol followed suit in March 1975; Liverpool, Newcastle and the GLC said yes in April; and Sheffield granted a certificate in July. In fact it seems only one council, Great Yarmouth, turned down the request. Flush with their successes, Cinecenta wrote again to the BBFC asking them to reconsider, but to no avail. Stephen Murphy replied, "We ourselves still think that this title is a film about strict sadism, and I can see little point in our offering to reconsider it at this point." [Note: the *Monthly Film Bulletin* records a longer running time for the GLC 'X' version: 97m. If this is correct, perhaps Cinecenta reinstated material they'd pre-cut? The original running time is given by the MFB as 116m.]

#### August 1973 - Sexy Darlings

Rather less controversial was *Sexy Darlings* aka *Robinson und seine wilden Sklavinnen*, submitted by Anthony Balch Films on the 8th of August 1973, with a running time of 81m00s. (Note: Balch's hand-written submission calls the film "The Sexy Darlings".) It was given an 'X' on the 14th of August 1973 with the imposition of a single cut, removing a shot of a knife being drawn across the tribal Chief's stomach during an impromptu operation.

#### September 1973 - Diary of a Nymphomaniac

Submitted by New Realm on the 27th of September 1973, with a running time of 86m44s, *Diary of a Nymphomaniac* arrived under the otherwise obscure title *Woman of Pleasure*. Censorship instructions were as follows: "Reduce opening club act to title shot and one establishing shot of breast caressing. When Linda holds knife prior to suicide, remove shot of her pubis. Reduce shots of Maria posing for pictures and shots of Maria and Linda posing together. Remove close-up of Ruth's pubis as she lies in bed. Remove shot of Maria's open legs. In addition [remove] of all shots of vaginas, whether 'split-beaver' or not. Remove dialogue '[I] wanted Anna's mouth against my sex', 'I give my willing vagina' and '[I] think of an enormous erection [or a] moist warm pussy' and in the pot-smoking scene, 'While you're high, life isn't so bad.'" In addition, shots of Linda straddling Maria, and Doris Thomas masturbating with a phone receiver, were removed, a scene of Linda writhing in bed at the clinic was reduced, and another persistent 'split-beaver' shot removed.

Although New Realm queried the decision, they were assured by the Board that there would be no change of stance. They therefore performed the cuts, but whether by accident or design they missed a couple. Surveying the trimmed version on the 19th of December 1973, an examiner noted that two lines of dialogue that ought to have been cut were still present. However, these were deemed of minor importance and the film was passed as *Diary of a Nymphomaniac* with a running time of 76m02s.



## February 1974 - The Lustful Amazon

*The Lustful Amazon* was submitted by Cinecenta on the 6th of February 1974 with a running time of 64m38s, apparently under the screen title 'Amazon Women'. However, documentation of the title is all over the place: it also appears as 'The Lustful Amazon', 'Lustful Amazons', 'The Lustful Amazons'. Perhaps the most reliable guide is an application some weeks later for a trailer certificate, by which time you would hope that someone had made up their mind: the trailer in question bore the title *The Lustful Amazon*.

The cuts were as follows: "Remove dialogue 'It's just his tool that you need, the pink monster that rises and swells and enters into us' ... reduce sound of Queen's orgasms ... reduce the orgy scene in which the Queen beats time and offers encouragement ... remove dialogue line, 'I'm going to cut it off' ... reduce whole scene with knife, removing especially the sight of knife trace around girl's breast and sight of girl grabbing at man's crotch ... the scene where man watches girls fight must end as man undresses and before he joins in ... remove all sight of tied girl who has arrow in stomach and blood on her body." With these trims performed, the film was viewed again by the BBFC on the 18th of February 1974, at which point two further demands were made: a reduction to the scene in which the Queen beats her fists against Maciste's chest, and the removal of any remaining instances of full frontal nudity. The running time of the eventual release version was 61m00s.

Once again, it wasn't just imagery the examiners were concerned about; sexually charged dialogue, however ridiculous or humorous, also transgressed the boundaries. Note too that another reference to castration is removed from dialogue, following a similar instance in *The Blood of Fu Manchu*. (According to *The Monthly Film Bulletin* the film was released in a subtitled version, an unusual conceit for a film one would expect to have been dubbed.)

## April 1974 - How to Seduce a Virgin

Submitted by Cinecenta on the 25th of April 1974 at an undisclosed pre-cut running time (the uncut version plays for 76m36s), *How to Seduce a Virgin* hit the buffers at the BBFC thanks to its intense Sadean overtones. Presumably dismayed that even this pre-cut version had been rejected, Cinecenta asked the Board to rewatch the film: accordingly, a second screening took place on the 8th of May 1974 in the presence of Stephen Murphy. The Board's position didn't waver, and in a letter to the GLC on the 22nd of October 1974, Murphy explained his misgivings: "[It] represents another example of the difference between a continuing control operation and 'spot' censorship. The version we saw of this film had already been heavily cut. Visually, it is for the most part fairly inoffensive: nevertheless, it seemed to us that, despite the editing, the flavour remained that of what is generally called soft-core pornography, with a great deal of voyeurism, masturbation, lesbianism and sadomasochism."

As with *The Demons*, Cinecenta approached various city and county councils for 'local X' certificates. Among those councils who sought BBFC guidance, Surrey Council upheld the ban, while the GLC (in January 1975) and Birmingham Council (in January 1977) agreed to pass the film. Given the success of this approach with *The Demons*, it seems likely that Cinecenta approached many other local authorities to ask for a certificate: the absence of BBFC correspondence to this effect suggests that local viewing bodies were sometimes inclined to make a decision without asking for the written opinion of the national censor. According to *The Monthly Film Bulletin* the UK version ran a lean 64m.

## May 1974 - The Bloody Judge

Submitted by Doverton as *Night of the Blood Monster* on the 20th of May 1974, at a pre-cut length of 81m34s, the film was granted an 'AA' certificate subject to two further cuts: overhead shots of Satchel kicking Sally and then banging her head against the floor were deemed unacceptable, as was the later sight of a woman's back covered in blood, presumably left over from the cut-to-ribbons dungeon scene. Approval was given on the 28th of May 1974. There is no precise record of the final running time but judging by the brevity of the scenes in question it must have been somewhere in the region of 81m00s.

## July 1974 - Les Ébranlées

Facts pertaining to the alleged British release of this film remain vague. Although the BBFC website lists a film submitted by Cinecenta on the 3rd of July 1974, under *Les Ébranlées*'s oft-reported English language export title 'Dolls for Sale', the admission document instead bears the alternative title 'The House of Lost Dolls', which is a direct English translation of a different film, Pierre Chevalier's *Les Maison des filles perdues* (1974), produced by Franco's old pals Eurociné! Unfortunately most of the usual BBFC documentation (examiners' notes, cuts lists, correspondence with the distributor) is missing; the only information I could glean was the title, UK distributor and original running time – 80m51s. Although the BBFC website carries a cast list, it doesn't tally with *Les Ébranlées* and bears no relation to *Les Maison des filles perdues*! Instead it lists Luis Barboo, Jesus Franco, Kali Hansa and Anne Libert, a combination of Franco cast regulars who, as it happens, have never appeared together in the same film. (The sore thumb here is Luis Barboo, the only one of the four not in *Les Ébranlées*.) It's worth noting that the Chevalier film, released uncut on German DVD by XT Video, runs for 81m05s, very close to the running time quoted on the "Dolls for Sale" admission document, whereas the only available versions of *Les Ébranlées* (a Belgian PAL and a French SECAM videotape) run to 79m38s at 25fps (which is 82m57s when converted to 24fps film). It's far from conclusive, but one senses that this could be a case of mistaken identity. It remains doubtful that *Les Ébranlées* was ever released in the UK.

## October 1974 - Célestine Maid at Your Service

Submitted by Cinecenta on the 9th of October 1974, with a running time of 84m01s, *Célestine* was cut for sexually explicit imagery (the fellatio scene in the stables, all scenes of women 'riding' sex partners, all 'between the legs' copulation shots) and dialogue ("When you cry your fanny wriggles and gets me excited!"). Trimmed to 79m, the film was duly checked over by the Board on the 21st of October 1974; as with *Diary of a Nymphomaniac* a few oversights remained, but the censor waved *Célestine* through on condition of one further cut; a close-up of a nipple being squeezed.

## December 1975 - Female Vampire

Submitted by Cinecenta on the 11th of December 1975, in a version so heavily pre-cut that the BBFC found nothing to offend them, this 58m54s version of *Female Vampire* – released under the glorious title *The Bare Breasted Countess* – spent several months trailing up and down the 'X' cinema circuit, playing to a trickle of no doubt underwhelmed or disappointed punters in venues like the Penthouse Cinema Clubs in Sheffield and Leicester.

*El*  
**COYOTE**

LA  
**JUSTICIA  
DEL  
COYOTE**

muerte  
de un  
ciclista

FULANO Y  
MENGANO

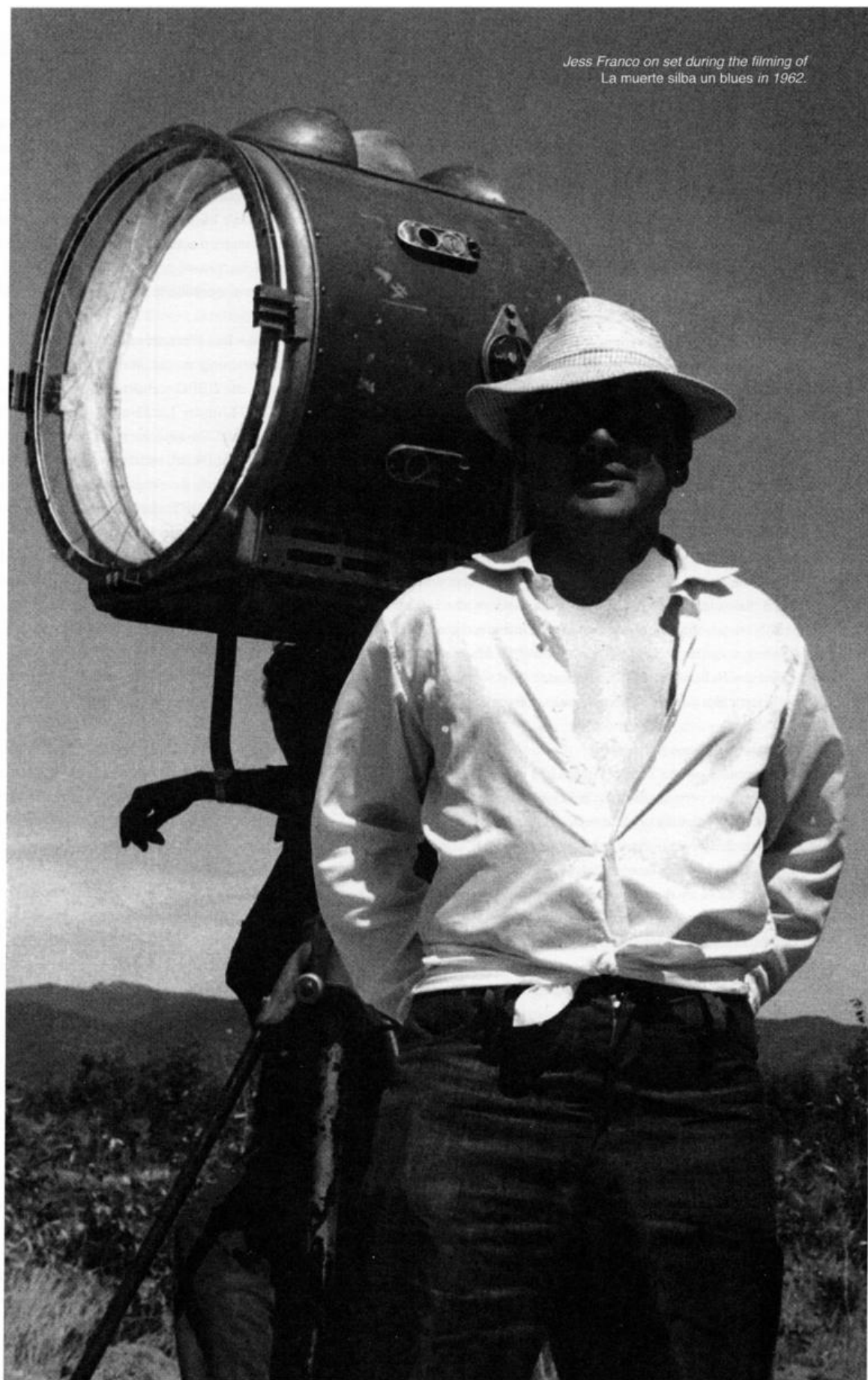
**HISTORIAS  
DE MADRID**

*Los Jueves.*  
**MILAGRO**

**"ANA DICE SI"**

un hecho  
violento

Jess Franco on set during the filming of  
*La muerte silba un blues* in 1962.



# JESS FRANCO FILMOGRAPHY

## PART ONE

### SHORT FILMS

1957	<b>El árbol de España</b>	(director/story/screenplay/music composer)
1958	<b>Pío Baroja</b>	(director)
1959	<b>Las playas vacías</b>	(director/story/screenplay)
1959	<b>Oro español</b>	(director/story/screenplay/music composer)
1960	<b>Estampas guipuzcoanas número 2: Pío Baroja</b>	(director)
1960	<b>El destierro del Cid</b>	(director)

### WORK FOR OTHER DIRECTORS

1953	<b>La Môme vert de gris</b> (d Bernard Borderie) as Cita con la muerte	(Spanish dubbing supervisor)
1954	<b>Cómicos</b> (d Juan Antonio Bardem)	(music composer/assistant director)
1954	<b>Felices pascuas</b> (d Juan Antonio Bardem)	(assistant director)
1954	<b>El coyote</b> (d Joaquín Luis Romero Marchent)	(story/screenplay/assistant director)
1954	<b>Educando a papá</b> (d Fernando Soler)	(assistant director)
1955	<b>Nosotros dos / We Two</b> (d Emilio Fernández)	(assistant producer/assistant director - both uncredited)
1955	<b>Muerte de un ciclista / Death of a Cyclist</b> (d Juan Antonio Bardem)	(uncredited 2nd assistant director)
1955	<b>Señora ama</b> (d Julio Bracho)	(assistant producer/assistant director - both uncredited)
1955	<b>La justicia del Coyote</b> (d Joaquín Luis Romero Marchent)	(co-screenplay/assistant director)
1956	<b>Miedo</b> (d León Klimovsky)	(co-screenplay/assistant director/actor)
1956	<b>Viaje de novios</b> (d León Klimovsky)	(assistant director)
1956	<b>Fulano y Mengano</b> (d Joaquín Luis Romero Marchent)	(writer/ uncredited assistant director)
1956	<b>Historias de Madrid</b> (d Ramón Comas)	(music composer/assistant director)
1956	<b>El expreso de Andalucía</b> (d Francisco Rovira Beleta)	(music composer - uncredited)
1957	<b>Los jueves, milagro</b> (d Luis G. Berlanga)	(assistant director)
1957	<b>El hombre que viajaba despacito</b> (d Joaquín Luis Romero Marchent)	(music composer/assistant director)
1957	<b>El maestro</b> (d Aldo Fabrizi) aka Il maestro	(additional music - uncredited)
1958	<b>Ana dice sí</b> (d Pedro Lazaga)	(production manager/actor - uncredited)
1958	<b>Un hecho violento</b> (d José María Forqué)	(music composer)
1958	<b>Luna de verano</b> (d Fernando Fernán Gómez)	(co-screenplay/production manager)
1959	<b>Llegaron los franceses</b> (d León Klimovsky)	(writer, song-writer)
1960	<b>Ama Rosa</b> (d León Klimovsky)	(co-screenplay)
1962	<b>La venganza del Zorro</b> (d Joaquín Luis Romero Marchent)	(story /screenplay)
1964	<b>El extraño viaje / Strange Voyage</b> (d Fernando Fernán Gómez)	(actor, as Venancio Vidal)
1965	<b>Misión Lisboa</b> (d Tulio Demichelli)	(writer, as 'David Khunne')
1969	<b>Cuadrilátero</b> (d Eloy de la Iglesia)	(music composer)
1978	<b>Poseida</b> (d Giulio Petroni)	(music composer)
1985	<b>L'Ange de la mort</b> (d Andrea Bianchi)	(co-writer, as 'D. Khunn')
1987	<b>Biba la banda</b> (d Ricardo Palacios)	(executive producer/2nd unit director)
1987	<b>Esa cosa con plumas</b> (d Oscar Ladoire)	(actor)

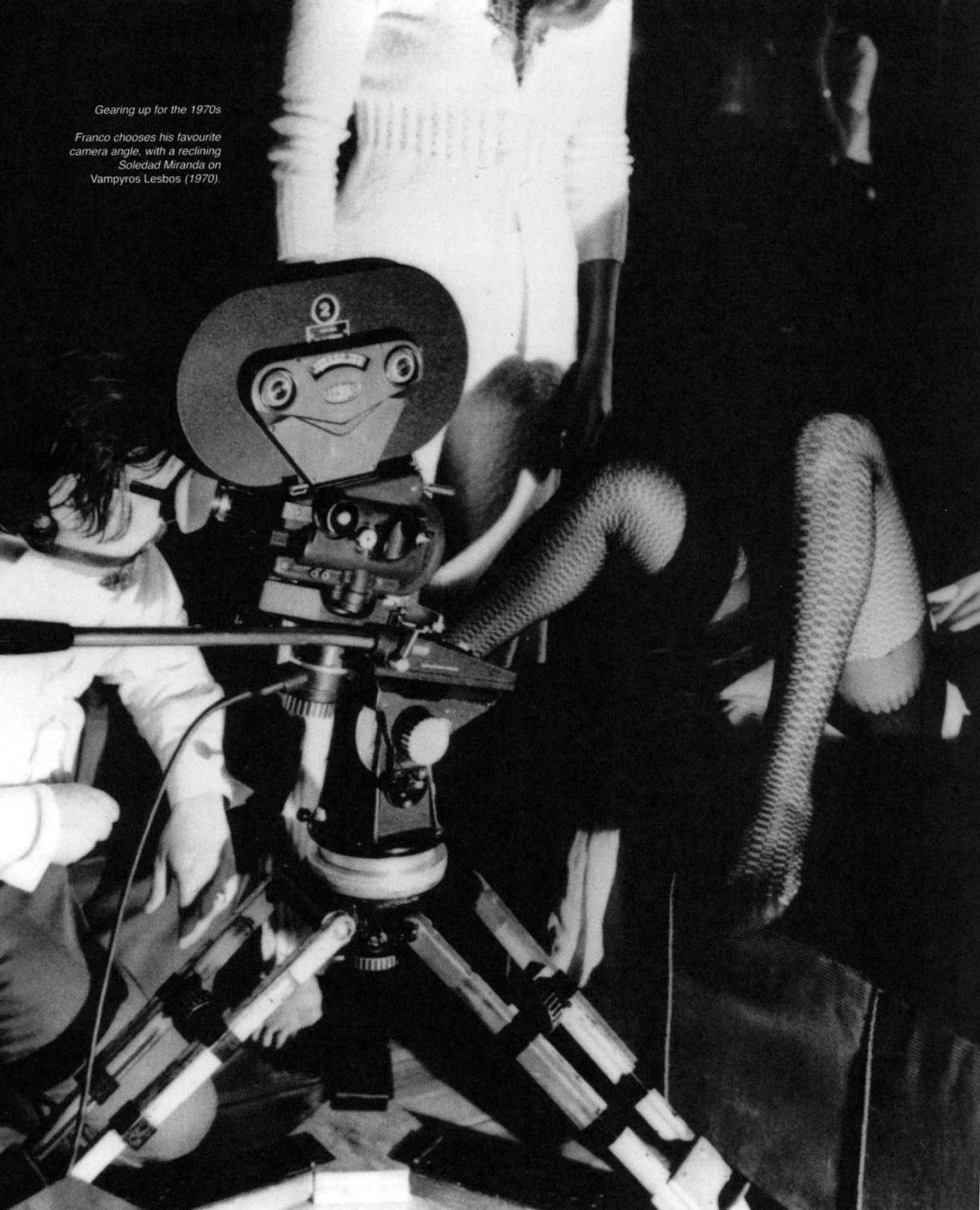
### ERRATA/UNVERIFIED

1956	<b>La melodía misteriosa</b> (d Juan Fortuny)	(writer as 'A.L. Marieux' - actually Marius Lesoeur)
1963	<b>55 Days at Peking</b> (d Nicolas Ray)	(unit assistant)
1956	<b>Around the World in Eighty Days</b> (d Michael Todd)	(actor-extra - uncredited)



*Gearing up for the 1970s*

*Franco chooses his favourite  
camera angle, with a reclining  
Soledad Miranda on  
Vampyros Lesbos (1970).*



# JESUS FRANCO FILMOGRAPHY

## PART TWO

### FEATURE FILMS

Release dates indicate theatrical bookings and do not include festival or trade screenings. Alternative titles are limited here to theatrical releases in the country or countries of origin, along with any English-language theatrical titles. Where there is space, relevant English-language DVD or Blu-ray titles are included. Some alternative theatrical titles have been dropped for reasons of space; a full list can be found at the head of the appropriate reviews. Where films were released theatrically in variant editions, these variants are listed in italics. For the purposes of this filmography I consider a variant edition to be one which adds substantial new material; where a film was shot in both a 'clothed' and 'nude' version, as was the case in *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein* for example, this is simply noted in the key column, as the narrative is the same in both cases. Versions which are shorter due to censorship are not included.

* = additional scenes.	? = release date unknown.	✓ = video release only.	Δ = hardcore filmed by Franco
† = different construction.	ø = unreleased theatrically.	§ = nude + clothed versions	# = hardcore inserts not by Franco

NO.	SHOT	RELEASED	TITLE
1.	1959	1961	<b>Tenemos 18 años</b>
2.	1960	1963	<b>Labios rojos</b>
3.	1960	1960	<b>La reina del Tabarín</b>
	1960	1961	* † <i>Mariquita La Belle de Tabarin</i>
4.	1960	1961	<b>Vampiresas 1930 (Volando hacia la fama) aka Certains les préfèrent noires</b>
5.	1961	1962	<b>Gritos en la noche</b>
		1964	* <i>L'Horrible Docteur Orlof aka The Awful Dr. Orlof aka The Demon Doctor</i>
6.	1962	1964	<b>La muerte silba un blues aka Agent 077 Opération "Jamaïque"</b>
		1966	* <i>Agent 077 Opération Sexy</i>
7.	1962	1964	§ <b>La mano de un hombre muerto</b>
		1967	* <i>Le Sadique baron von Klaus aka Le Sadique aka The Sadistic Baron von Klaus</i>
8.	1963	1964	<b>Rififi en la ciudad (Vous souvenez vous de Paco?)</b>
9.	1963	1964	<b>El Llanero aka Le Jaguar</b>
10.	1964	1965	<b>El secreto del doctor Orloff aka Dr. Orloff's Monster</b>
		1965	* <i>Les Maîtresses du docteur Jekyll aka Dr. Jekyll's Mistresses</i>
11.	1965	1966	<b>Miss Muerte aka The Diabolical Dr. Z</b>
12.	1965	1966	<b>Cartas boca arriba aka Cartes sur tables aka Attack of the Robots</b>
13.	1966	1968	<b>Residencia para espías aka Golden Horn</b>
14.	1966	1967	<b>Lucky el intrépido aka Agente Speciale L.K. (Operazione Re Mida) aka Lucky the Inscrutable</b>
15.	1967	1968	<b>Necronomicon aka Succubus</b>
		1971	<i>Delirium</i>
16.	1967	1968	<b>El caso de las dos bellezas aka Rote Lippen Sadisterotica aka Two Undercover Angels aka Sadisterotica</b>
17.	1967	1969	<b>Küss mich Monster aka Kiss Me Monster</b>
		1970	* † <i>Bésame monstruo</i>
18.	1967	1968	<b>The Blood of Fu Manchu aka Fu Manchú y el beso de la muerte aka Kiss and Kill aka Der Todeskuss des Dr. Fu Man Chu</b>
19.	1968	?	<b>The Girl from Rio aka Future Women aka Mothers of America</b>
		1969	* <i>Die Sieben Männer der Sumuru aka La ciudad sin nombres</i>
20.	1968	1969	<b>99 Women</b>
		1969	* <i>99 mujeres</i>
		1974	* # <i>Les Brûlantes</i>
21.	1968	1969	<b>Justine aka Marquis de Sade: Justine aka Justine ovvero Le disavventure della virtù aka Justine and Juliet</b>
22.	1968	1969	<b>The Castle of Fu Manchu aka El castillo de Fu-Manchu aka Die Folterkammer des Dr. Fu Man Chu</b>
23.	1968	1970	<b>Venus in Furs</b>
		1969	* † <i>Paroxismus ...può una morta rivivere per amore?...</i>
24.	1969	1970	<b>Eugenie... the Story of her Journey into Perversion aka Wildkatzen aka Philosophy in the Boudoir</b>
25.	1969	?	<b>Sex Charade</b>
26.	1969	1970	<b>The Bloody Judge aka Der Hexentöter von Blackmoor aka Il trono di fuoco aka Night of the Blood Monster</b>
		1971	* <i>El proceso de las brujas</i>
27.	1969	1973	<b>Les Cauchemars naissent la nuit aka Nightmares Come at Night</b>
28.	1969	1970	<b>Count Dracula aka El conde Drácula aka Il conte Dracula aka Nachts, wenn Dracula erwacht</b>

NO.	SHOT	RELEASED	TITLE
29.	1970	1974	<b>Eugenie aka Eugenie de Sade aka Eugenia</b>
30.	1970	1971	<b>Vampyros Lesbos Erbin des Dracula aka Vampyros Lesbos</b>
		1974	* † <i>Las vampiras</i>
31.	1970	1971	<b>Sie Tötete in Ekstase aka She Killed in Ecstasy</b>
32.	1970	1971	<b>Der Teufel Kam aus Akasawa aka El diablo que vino de Akasawa aka The Devil Came from Akasawa</b>
33.	1970	1971	<b>X 312 Flug zur Hölle aka Vuelo al infierno aka X312 - Flight to Hell</b>
34.	1971	1972	<b>El muerto hace las maletas aka Der Todesrächer von Soho</b>
35.	1971	1974	<b>La venganza del doctor Mabuse</b>
		1972	* † <i>Dr. M schlägt Zu</i>
36.	1971	1972	<b>Jungfrauen-Report</b>
37.	1971	1972	<b>Robinson und seine wilden Sklavinnen aka Trois filles nues sur l'île de Robinson aka Sexy Darlings</b>
38.	1971	ø	<b>La Nuit de l'étoiles filantes</b>
		1973	<i>Une vierge chez les morts vivants [version 1]</i>
		1973	† <i>Christina Princesse de l'erotisme aka I desideri erotici di Christine</i>
		1981	* <i>Une vierge chez les morts vivants [version 2] aka A Virgin among the Living Dead</i>
39.	1971	1972	§ <b>Dracula prisonnier de Frankenstein aka Dracula contra Frankenstein aka Dracula Prisoner of Frankenstein</b>
40.	1972	1972	<b>A filha de Dracula aka La fille de Dracula aka Dracula's Daughter</b>
41.	1972	1975	<b>Los amantes de la isla del Diablo aka Devil's Island Lovers</b>
		1974	* † <i>Quartiers des femmes</i>
42.	1972	1973	§ <b>La maldición de Frankenstein aka La malédiction de Frankenstein aka The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein</b>
43.	1972	1973	<b>Les Demons aka Os Demonios aka The Demons</b>
44.	1972	1973	<b>Un capitán de quince años aka Un capitaine de quinze ans</b>
45.	1972	1976	<b>Un silencio de tumba</b>
46.	1972	1973	<b>Les Ébranlées</b>
47.	1972	1973	<b>Le Journal intime d'une nymphomane aka Diary of a Nymphomaniac aka Sinner: The Secret Diary of a Nymphomaniac</b>
48.	1973	1978	<b>Los ojos del doctor Orloff aka The Sinister Eyes of Dr. Orloff</b>
49.	1973	1974	<b>Plaisir à trois aka How to Seduce a Virgin</b>
50.	1973	ø	<b>La Comtesse perverse aka Countess Perverse</b>
		1974	* <i>Les Croqueuses [version 1]</i>
		1974	Δ <i>Les Croqueuses [version 2]</i>
		1980	# <i>Sexy Nature</i>
51.	1973	1974	<b>Maciste contre la reine des Amazones aka The Lustful Amazon</b>
52.	1973	ø	<b>Les Exploits érotiques de Maciste dans l'Atlantide</b>
		1975	* <i>Les Gloutonnes</i>
53.	1973	1976	<b>Al otro lado del espejo</b>
		1975	* † <i>Le Miroir obscène</i>
		1981	* # <i>Lo specchio del piacere</i>
54.	1973	?	§ <b>La Comtesse noire aka Female Vampire aka Femmes Vampires aka Vampier Vrouwen</b>
		1975	Δ <i>Les Avalouses aka Lüsterne Vampire im Spermausch</i>
		?	* <i>La Comtesse aux seins nus aka Erotikill aka The Bare Breasted Countess</i>
55.	1973	1976	<b>La noche de los asesinos aka Night of the Skull aka Night of the Assassins</b>
56.	1973	1974	<b>Les Nuits brûlantes de Linda aka The Hot Nights of Linda</b>
		1975	* <i>Mais qui donc a violé Linda? aka La felicità nel peccato aka Erotic Dreams</i>
57.	1973	1979	<b>Des Frissons sur la peau aka Des Frissons sous la peau</b>
		?	* <i>Tender and Perverse Emanuelle</i>
		?	Δ <i>[Hardcore variant; title unknown]</i>
58.	1973	1977	<b>Embrasse moi aka La calda bestia aka Kiss Me Killer</b>
59.	1974	1975	§ <b>Exorcismes et Messes noires aka Exorcisme aka Exorcism</b>
		1975	<i>Demoniac [1]</i>
		1975	Δ <i>Sexorcismes</i>
		1981	* † <i>The Sadist of Notre Dame aka Demoniac [2]</i>
60.	1974	1974	<b>Célestine..... bonne à tout faire aka Célestine Maid at Your Service aka Célestine, An All Round Maid</b>
61.	1974	1974	<b>Lorna... l'exorciste aka Les Possédées du diable (Lorna, l'exorciste) aka Linda aka Lorna... the Exorcist</b>
62.	1974	1975	<b>Les Chatouilleuses</b>
		1982	# <i>Le sexy goditrici</i>
63.	1974	1974	<b>Le Jouisseur aka L'Homme le plus sexy du monde</b>
64.	1974	1975	<b>Les Grandes Emmerdeuses</b>
65.	1975	1976	<b>Juliette 69</b>
		1979	* † <i>Justine</i>
66.	1975	1977	<b>Midnight Party aka Lady Porno aka Heisse Berührungen</b>



NO.	SHOT	RELEASED	TITLE
67.	1975	1977	Shining Sex aka Shining Sex la fille au sexe brillant aka Het meisje met de glanzende sex
68.	1975	1976	Frauengefängnis aka Barbed Wire Dolls aka Caged Women
69.	1975	?	Diamants pour l'enfer aka Les flagellées de la cellule 69 aka Women Behind Bars
70.	1975	1978	Downtown aka Die Nackten Puppen der Unterwelt (Downtown)
71.	1975	1977	Die Sklavinnen
72.	1975	1977	Die Marquise von Sade aka Doriana Gray
		?	* Das Bildnis der Doriana Gray [softcore version]
73.	1976	1976	Mädchen im Nachtverkehr aka Heißer Sex im Nachtverkehr aka Girls in the Night Traffic
		?	Δ † Wilde Lust
74.	1976	1977	Weißer Haut und schwarze Schenkel
75.	1976	1976	Jack the Ripper Der Dirnenmörder von London aka Jack the Ripper
76.	1976	1977	In 80 Betten um die Welt aka Mondo Erotico
77.	1976	1977	Greta - Haus ohne Männer aka Greta, the Mad Butcher aka Ilsa the Wicked Warden aka Wanda the Wicked Warden
78.	1976	1977	Die Liebesbriefe einer Portugiesischen Nonne aka Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun
79.	1977	1977	Das Frauenhaus aka Blue Rita - le cabaret des filles perverses aka Le cabaret des filles perverses
		?	# Blue Rita
80.	1977	1977	Die Teuflischen Schwestern aka Satanic Sisters aka Sexy Sisters aka Swedish Nympho Slaves
81.	1977	1978	Frauen Ohne Unschuld aka Wicked Women
82.	1977	1977	Frauen im Liebeslager aka Love Camp
83.	1977	1977	Der Ruf der Blondes Göttin aka Voodoo Passion
84.	1977	1978	Frauen für Zellen-Block 9 aka Women in Cellblock 9
85.	1978	1978	Cocktail spécial
86.	1978	1979	Elles font tout
87.	1978	1979	Je brûle de partout
88.	1978	1980	Ópalo de fuego (mercaderes del sexo)
		1980	* † Deux espionnes avec un petit slip à fleur aka Two Female Spies With Flowered Panties
89.	1979	1981	Las chicas de Copacabana aka Les filles de Copacabana aka The Girls of the Copacabana
90.	1979	1980	Sinfonia Erótica
91.	1980	1981	Aberraciones sexuales de una mujer casada
		1983	* Cecilia aka Cécilia fille de feu
92.	1980	1981	Eugénie Historia de una perversión aka Erotismo
93.	1980	?	El Canibal aka Jungfrau unter Kannibalen aka Sexo canibal aka Devil Hunter
94.	1980	1981	La déesse des barbares aka Mondo Cannibale 3. Teil Die blonde Göttin der Kannibalen aka The Cannibals
95.	1980	1981	Sadomania - Hölle der Lust aka Sadomania (El infierno de la pasión) aka Sadomania
96.	1980	1981	Die Säge Des Todes aka Bloody Moon
97.	1980	1981	Die Nackten Superhexen vom Rio Amore aka Orgia de ninfómanas aka Linda aka The Story of Linda
98.	1981	1981	La chica de las bragas transparentes aka Pick-Up Girls
99.	1981	1982	El sexo está loco
100.	1981	1982	El lago de las virgenes aka La isla de las virgenes
101.	1981	1982	La noche de los sexos abiertos
102.	1981	1982	Macumba Sexual
103.	1981	1982	L'abime des morts-vivants aka The Oasis of the Living Dead
		1983	* † La tumba de los muertos vivientes
104.	1981	1983	Confesiones intimas de una exhibicionista
105.	1982	1982	Botas negras, látigo de cuero
106.	1982	1984	El siniestro Dr. Orloff
107.	1982	1982	Las orgías inconfesables de Emmanuelle aka The Inconfessable Orgies of Emmanuelle
108.	1982	1983	El Hotel de los ligues
109.	1982	1983	La casa de las mujeres perdidas aka Perversión en la isla perdida
110.	1982	1983	La mansion de los muertos vivientes aka Mansion of the Living Dead
111.	1982		o La sombra del Judoka contra el Dr. Wong
112.	1982	1983	Gemidos de placer
113.	1983		o Furia en el trópico
		1986	Δ Orgasmo Perverso
			o Mujeres acorraladas (1986)
114.	1983	1983	El tesoro de la diosa blanca
		1988	* † Les diamants du Kilimandjaro aka Diamonds of Kilimandjaro
115.	1983		o El hundimiento de la casa Usher
		1988	* † Névrose aka Neurosis aka Revenge in the House of Usher
116.	1983	1983	Mil sexos tiene la noche

NO.	SHOT	RELEASED	TITLE
117.	1983	1984	Δ Lilian (la virgen pervertida)
118.	1983	1983	Historia sexual de O aka The Sexual Story of 'O'
119.	1983	1986	Sola ante el terror
120.	1983	1986	Sangre en mis zapatos
121.	1983		ø Los blues de la calle Pop (Aventuras de Felipe Malboro, volumen 8)
122.	1983	1985	En busca del Dragon Dorado
123.	1983	1983	Camino Solitario
124.	1983	1985	Las chicas del tanga
125.	1983	1984	Δ Una rajita para dos
126.	1984	1984	¿Cuánto Cobra un espía?
127.	1984	1985	Juego sucio en Casablanca aka Sale jeu a Casablanca
128.	1984		ø La chica de los labios rojos
129.	1984		ø Bahía Blanca
130.	1984	1985	Δ Un pito para tres
131.	1985		ø La esclava blanca
132.	1985	1985	Δ El ojete de Lulu
133.	1985	1985	Δ El chupete de Lulu
134.	1985		ø Las últimas de Filipinas
135.	1985	1987	Viaje a Bangkok, ataúd incluido?
136.	1985		ø Bangkok, città con la muerte
137.	1985	1985	Δ Entre pitos anda el juego
138.	1985	1986	Δ El mirón y la exhibicionista
139.	1986	1986	Δ Para las niñas... leche calentita
140.	1986	1986	Δ Las chuponas
141.	1986		ø Esclavas del crimen
142.	1987	1987	Δ Phollastia
143.	1987	1987	Δ Phalo Crest
144.	1987	1988	Dark Mission (Les fleurs du mal) aka Dark Mission (Operación Cocaina) aka Dark Mission, Flowers of Evil
145.	1987	1988	Les prédateurs de la nuit aka Faceless
146.	1989	?	Esmeralda Bay aka La bahía esmeralda
147.	1989	?	La chute des aigles aka Fall of the Eagles
148.	1990	1994	Downtown Heat (ciudad baja) aka Downtown Heat
149.	1996	1996	Killer Barbys aka Vampire Killer Barbys
150.	1997		✓ Tender Flesh aka Carne fresca
151.	1998		✓ Marie-Cookie and the Killer Tarantula aka Eight Legs to Love You
152.	1998		✓ Lust for Frankenstein
153.	1998		✓ Dr. Wong's Virtual Hell aka El infierno virtual del Dr. Wong
154.	1999		✓ Vampire Blues aka Los blues del vampiro
155.	1999		✓ Red Silk aka Seda roja
156.	1999		✓ Broken Dolls aka Muñecas rotas
157.	2000		✓ Helter Skelter
158.	2000		✓ Blind Target aka Obietivo a ciégas
159.	2001		✓ Vampire Junction
160.	2002		✓ Incubus
161.	2003		✓ Killer Barbys Vs. Dracula
162.	2005		✓ Flores de la pasión aka Jess Franco's Passion
163.	2005		✓ Flores de perversión aka Jess Franco's Perversion
164.	2005		✓ Snakewoman
165.	2008		✓ La cripta de las mujeres malditas aka A Bad Day at the Cemetery
166.	2010		✓ La cripta de las mujeres malditas II aka A Bad Day at the Cemetery II
167.	2010		✓ Paula-Paula
168.	2012		✓ Al Pereira vs. The Alligator Ladies
169.	2012		✓ La cripta de las condenadas aka Crypt of the Condemned
170.	2012		✓ La cripta de las condenadas 2 aka Crypt of the Condemned 2
171.	2013		✓ Revenge of the Alligator Ladies

# JESS FRANCO FILMOGRAPHY

## PART THREE

### GROUP 1: UNFINISHED OR UNRELEASED FILMS

\* not completed      † completed but unreleased      § ambiguous

1970	*	<b>Juliette</b>
1972	§	<b>Relax Baby</b>
1972	§	<b>El misterio del castillo rojo</b>
1973	*	<b>La casa del ahorcado</b>
1973	*	<b>Lascivia</b> aka <b>Lasvive</b>
1975	*	<b>Mandinga</b>
1975	*	<b>L'assassin portait des bas noirs</b>
1980	*	<b>El escarabajo de oro</b>
1981	*	<b>Adolescencia</b>
1983	†	<b>El abuelo, la condesa y escarlata la traviesa</b>
1983	†	<b>Barrio Chino</b>
1983	*	<b>Tundra y el templo del sol</b>
1984	*	<b>El asesino llevada medias negras</b>
1984	†	<b>Voces de muerte</b>
1985	†	<b>Una de chinos</b>
1985	*	<b>Gentes del Rio</b>
	*	<i>El hombre que mató a Mengele</i>
	*	<i>Il faut tuer Klaus</i>
1986	†	<b>Teleporno</b>
1986	*	<b>Bragueta Story</b>
1986	*	<b>El rinoceronte blanco</b>
1986	†	<b>Las tribulaciones de un Buda bizco</b>
1986	*	<b>SIDA La peste del siglo XX</b>
1993	†	<b>Jungle of Fear</b>

### GROUP 0: UNMADE PROJECTS

The following 'Jess Franco films' exist only as ghosts from a parallel universe. All except the first are drawn from the contents of a suitcase recovered from the South of France by Erwin Dietrich in 1975, kindly made available to the author of this book by Roman Güttinger, Guiskard Oberparleiter and Uwe Huber. The materials vary from typed synopses to hand-drawn poster art, from eight page hand-written story treatments to personal correspondence and ephemera. Full details, and numerous images, will be published in *Murderous Passions Vol. 2*

*Los colgados*  
*Dynamite South*  
*Ectasse Island*  
*El extraño huesped*  
*Black Nana*  
*Las brujas de Zaragoza*  
*Concert en sex majeur aka Melodie en sex majeur*  
*Dracula Junior*  
*Yacula*  
*Dunia, la novia eterna*  
*Blue Medea*  
*Los desesperados*  
*Face a mezzanotte*  
*Las hermanas de la cruz*  
*La Porte du brouillard*

### GROUP 2: INSTANCES OF JESS FRANCO STEPPING IN TO HELP DIRECT SOMEONE ELSE'S FILM

\* confirmed      Δ unconfirmed

1967		<b>Eve</b> aka <b>Eva en la selva</b> - dir: Jeremy Summers
1973	Δ	<b>La marque de Zorro</b> - dir: 'James Gardner' [i.e. Marius Lesoeur and Alain Payet]
1974	Δ	<b>Une vierge pour Saint-Tropez</b> - dir: Georges Friedland
1975	*	<b>Une cage dorée</b> - dir: Marius Lesoeur [as 'A.M. Frank']
1980	*	<b>Kalt wie Eis</b> - dir: Carl Schenkel

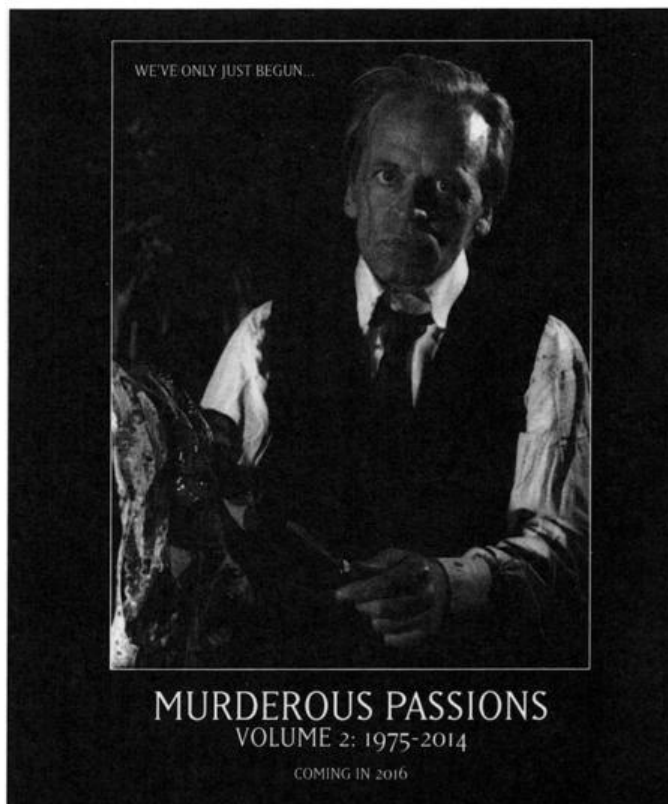
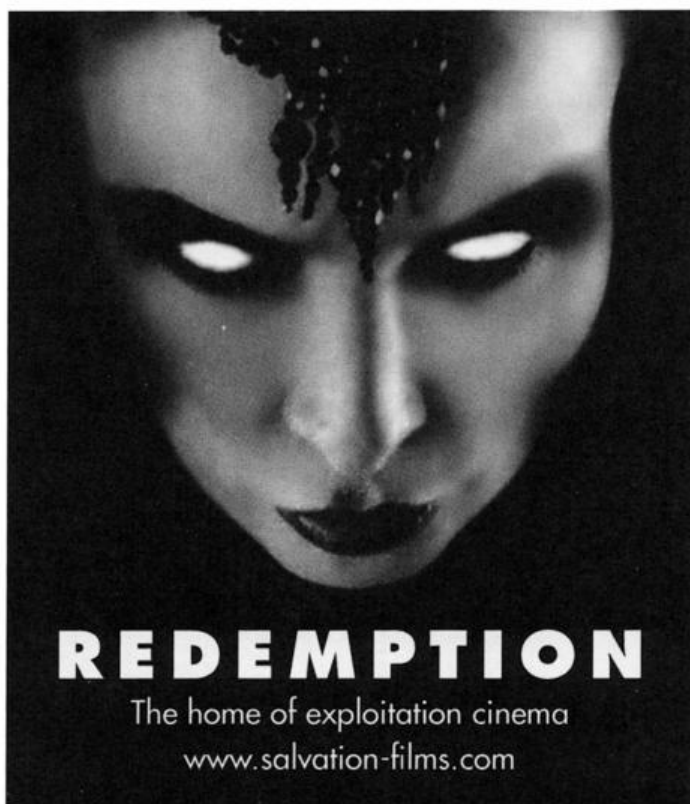
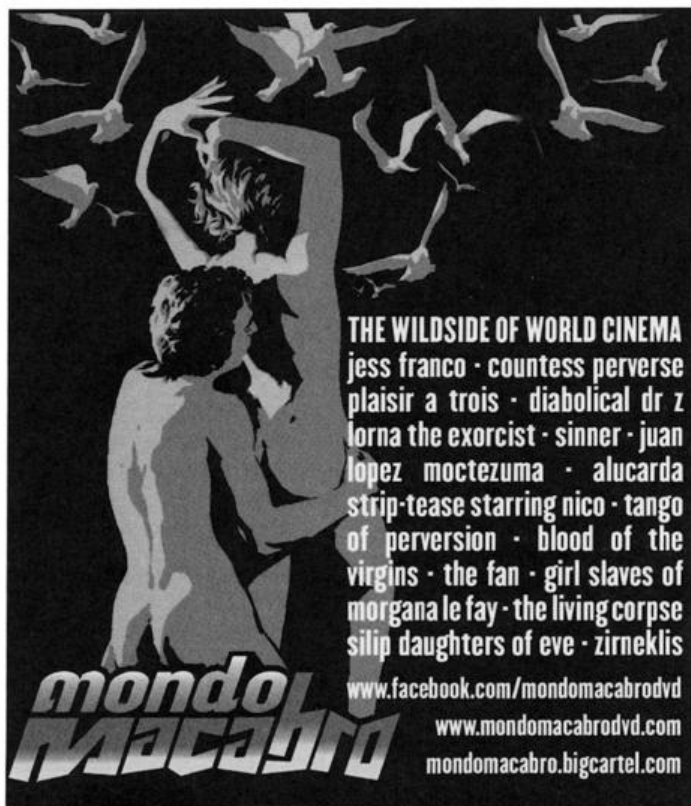
### GROUP 3: FILMS NOT DIRECTED BY FRANCO WHICH USE FOOTAGE FROM HIS WORK

1980		<b>Les Gardiennes du pénitencier</b> aka <b>Un paradis pour des brutes, un enfer pour des femmes</b> aka <b>Jailhouse Wardress</b> dir: Alain Deruelle aka 'Allan W. Steeve' [includes footage from Franco's <i>Frauengefängnis</i> , Alain Payet's <i>Train spécial pour SS</i> and Patrice Rhomm's <i>Elsa Fräulein SS</i> ]
1981		<b>Lola 2000</b> [includes footage from <i>Cocktail spécial</i> and <i>Elles font tout</i> + Alain Payet's <i>Furies sexuelles</i> and <i>Prostitution clandestine</i> ]
1983		<b>Claire</b> [includes footage from <i>Elles font tout</i> , <i>Cocktail spécial</i> and <i>Je brûle de partout</i> + Joe D'Amato's <i>Le ereditiere superporno</i> ]
1990		<b>Golden Temple Amazons</b> [includes footage from <i>Tundra y el templo del sol</i> + new material by Alain Payet]

### GROUP 4: DISPUTED TITLES

1991		<b>À la poursuite de Barbara</b> [dir: Jean Rollin]
1978		<b>Convoi de filles</b> aka <b>A l'Est de Berlin</b> [dir: Pierre Chevalier as 'Peter Knight'] There is no evidence, anecdotally or visually, to support the theory that Franco worked on this film, although it does include some of the same war footage Franco used in <i>The Oasis of the Zombies</i> , culled in both cases from Alfredo Rizzo's <i>I giardini del diavolo</i> (1971).







Jesús Franco (aka Jess Franco) died in 2013, an iconic figure in world cinema. For devotees of the weird and sado-erotic he was a cinematic magician, creating unique and disturbing dream-worlds on the cheapest of budgets. A passionate believer in artistic and sexual freedom, he constantly pushed at the boundaries of taste and censorship during an extraordinary career spanning sixty years.

The director of more than 170 films, Jess Franco was a genuine obsessive, a man whose love of the medium knew no limits. His delirious spontaneity turned the basics of popular cinema – sex and violence – into an avant-garde whirl of sensations. Franco's taste for the kinky and horrific, his lifelong obsession with the Marquis de Sade and his idiosyncratic visual style birthed a whole new strain of erotic cinema. Films like *Succubus*, *Eugenie*, *Vampyros Lesbos*, *Virgin Among the Living Dead* and *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein* throw out the rulebook and reinvent genre cinema, while even his weakest efforts exude something strange and wild amid the chaos. Meanwhile, multiple versions and international variants turn the Franco experience into a dizzying hall of mirrors, entrancing for the aficionado but confusing for beginners – until now.

Stephen Thrower, acclaimed author of *Nightmare USA*, has devoted five years to examining each and every Jess Franco film, and in this book – the first of a two-volume set – he delves into Franco's career from 1953 to 1974. Assisted by esteemed critic and researcher Julian Grainger, Thrower shines a light into the darkest corners of the Franco filmography, reappraising every film and uncovering previously unknown information about them.

Unparalleled in scope and ambition, as obsessive as its subject, *Murderous Passions* provides the definitive assessment of Jess Franco's labyrinthine film universe.



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